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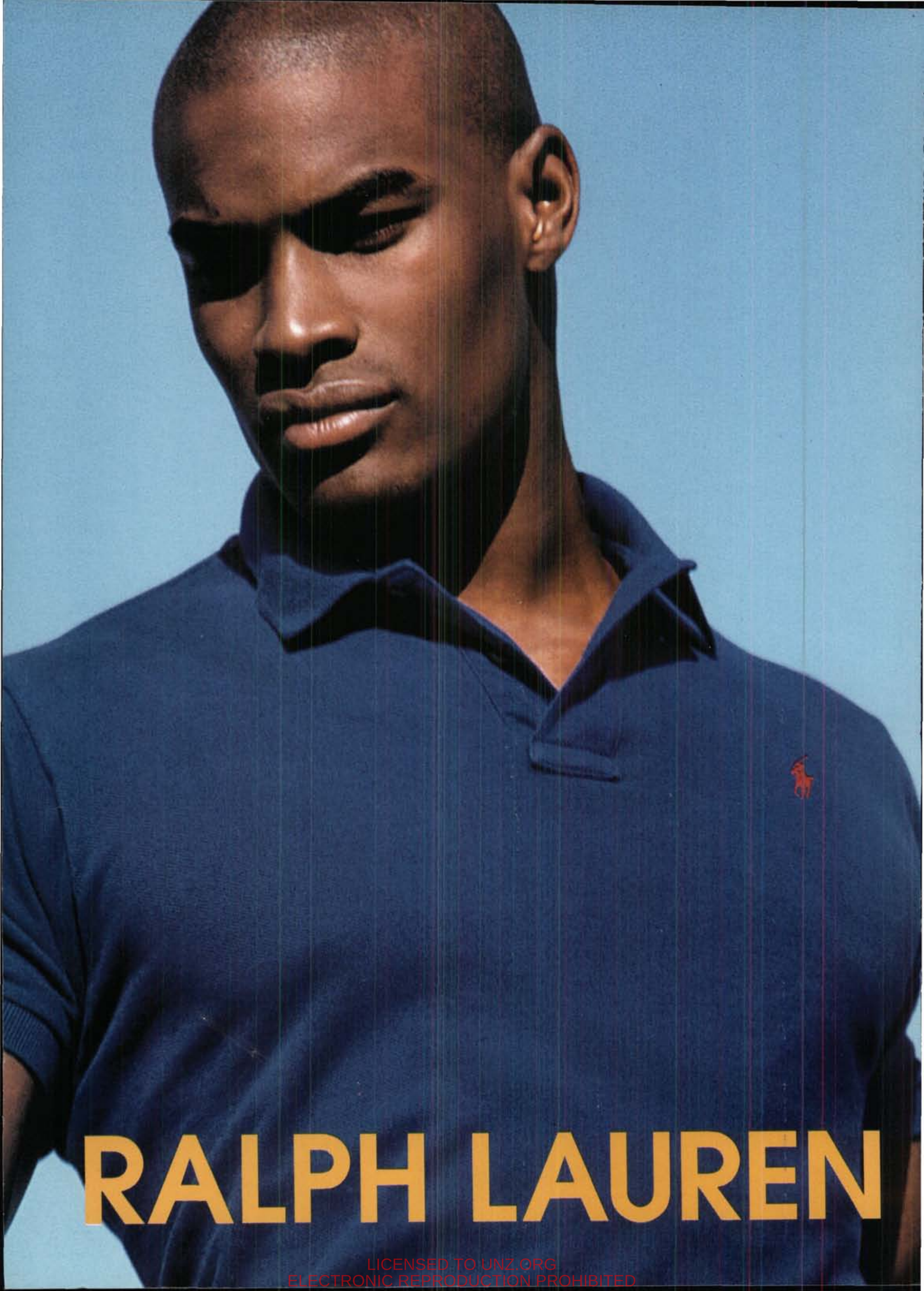
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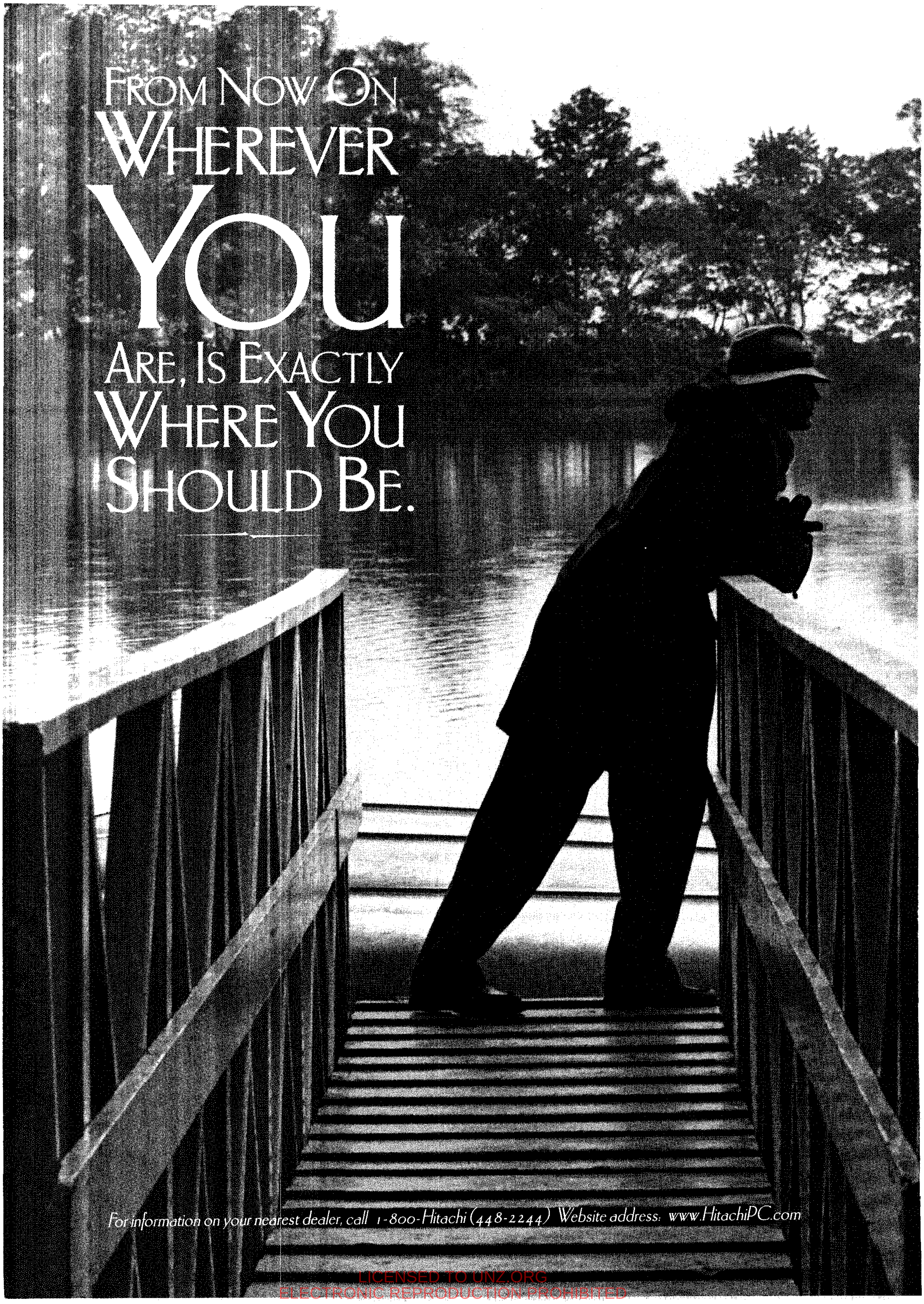
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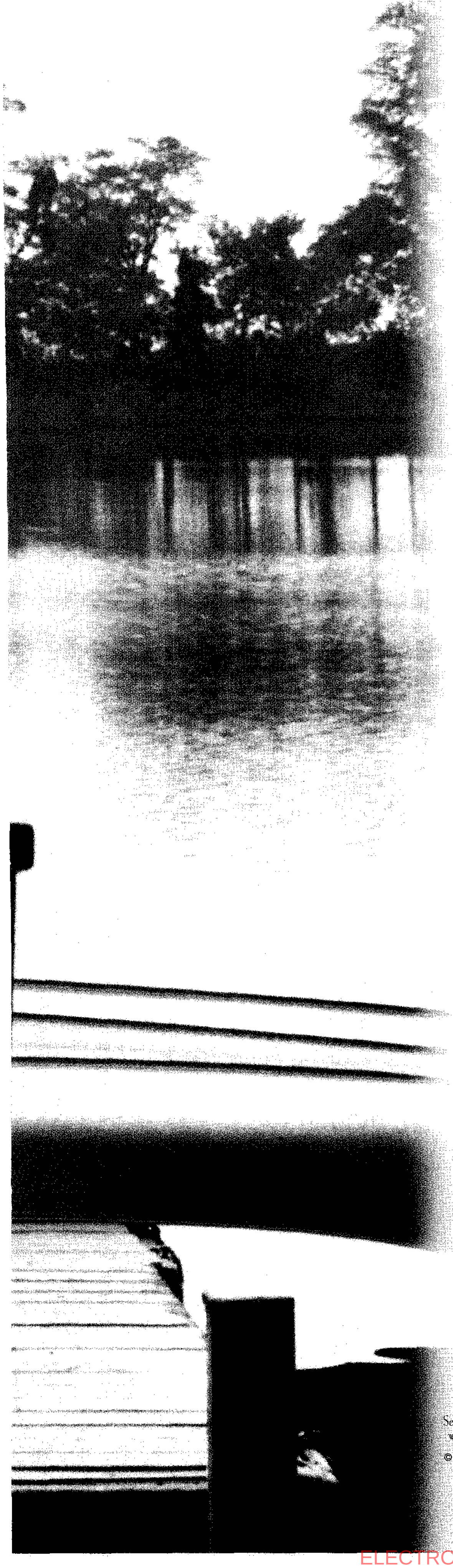

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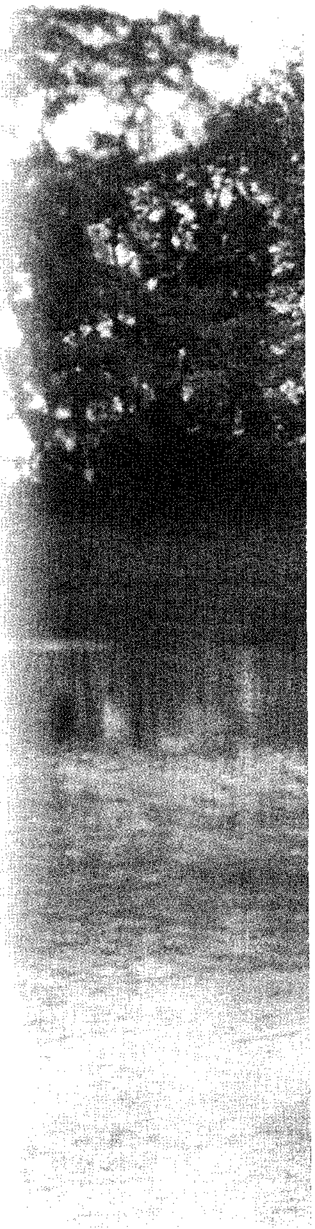

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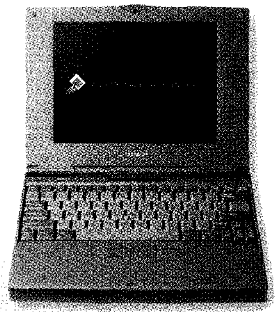

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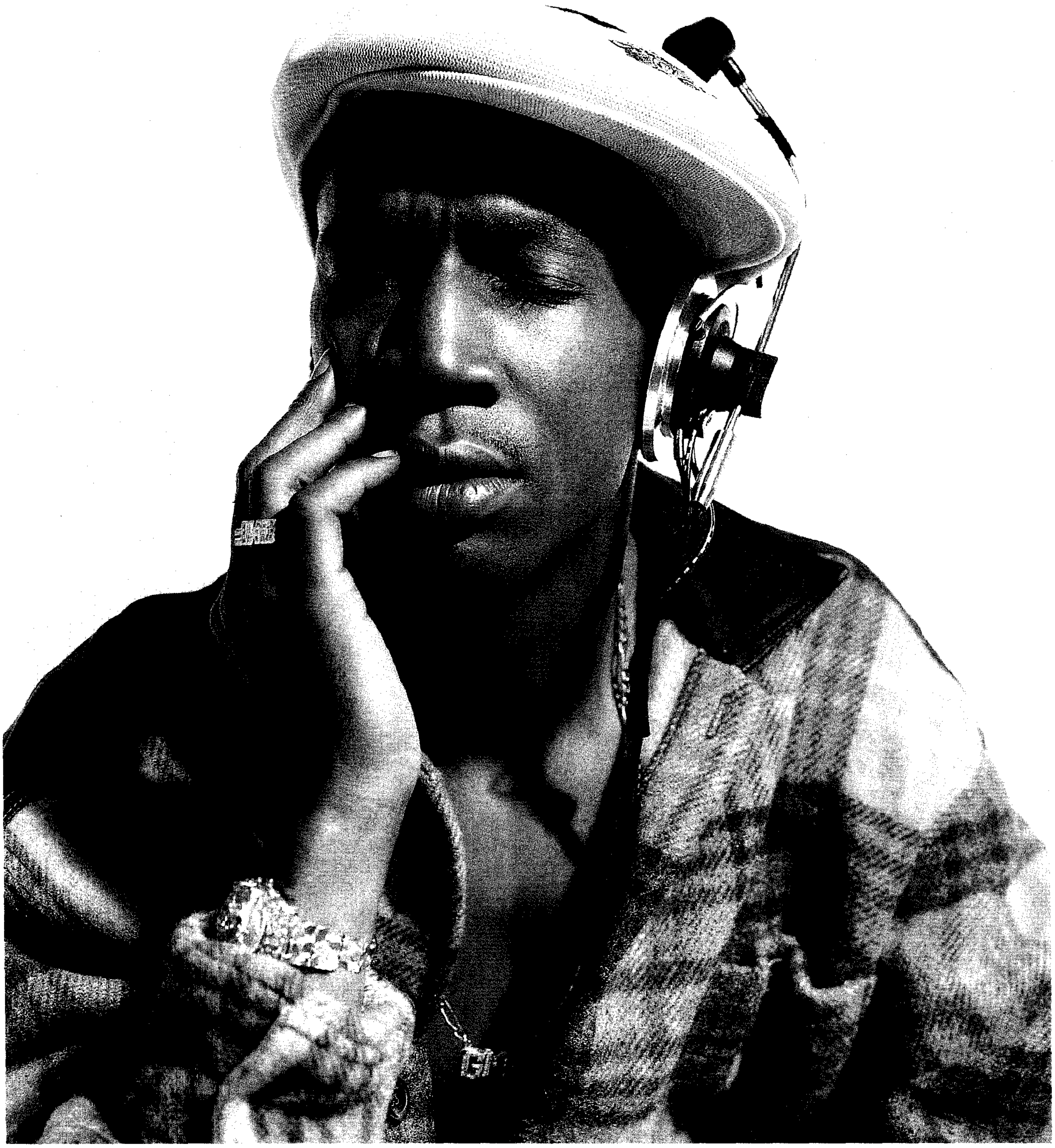

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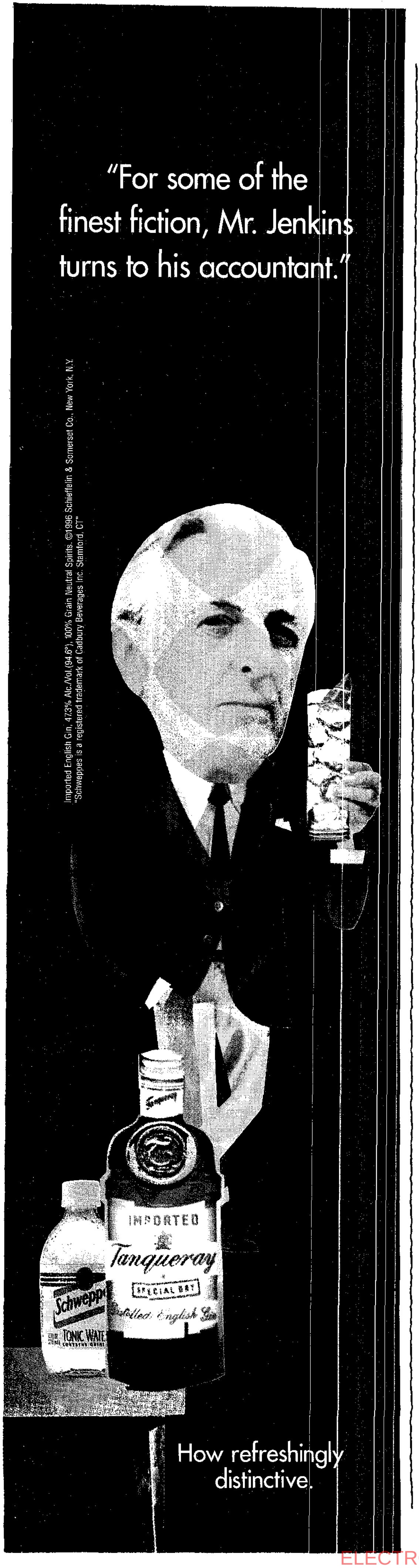
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THE NEW YORKER
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JUNE 24 & JULY 1, 1996

COMMENT The Seductions of Storytelling . . . . *Bill Buford* 11
Is there a narrative renaissance?

IN THE MAIL 14

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN 16

THE TALK OF THE TOWN 43
Thomas Pynchon and the band; to Alice, love Gertrude; etc.

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS
In Defense of the Novel, Yet Again . . . . *Salman Rushdie* 48

PERSONAL HISTORY Neruda and Borges . . . . *Alastair Reid* 56
What did they have in common? Little, except the Spanish language and their peripatetic translator.

LETTERS Three Words . . . . *Ernest Hemingway & Maxwell Perkins* 73
The ones the novelist wasn't allowed to use.

PERSONAL HISTORY The Fourth State of Matter . . . . *Jo Ann Beard* 80
Space physics and reflections on immortality.

FICTION "State of England" . . . . *Martin Amis* 92
A nation of horrible people.

SHOWCASE Donald Antrim . . . . *Jeffrey Eugenides, Ulrike Schamoni* 96

LETTERS Shakespeare Had It Easy . . . . *Walker Percy* 100

LETTERS A Rational Exchange . . . . *T. S. Eliot & Djuna Barnes* 107

LETTERS Interpretation . . . . *Boris Pasternak* 110

FICTION "Miserere" . . . . *Robert Stone* 112
A librarian with an obsession.

SHOWCASE Joan Didion . . . . *Nancy Franklin, Brigitte Lacombe* 118

LETTERS Dinner with the Princess . . . . *Gore Vidal* 121

FICTION "The Times Square Story" . . . . *Geoffrey O'Brien* 122
Strip joints, pot parties, mambo clubs, dice games . . .

MORALITY TALE Adultery . . . . *Tim Parks* 128
Why not?

SHOWCASE The Dark Room Collective . . . . *Cornelius Eady, Kwaku Alston* 132

FICTION "Save My Child!" . . . . *Cynthia Ozick* 134
Rette mein Kind! A phone call in German.

LETTERS Who Is Godot? . . . . *Samuel Beckett* 136
The playwright explains (or doesn't) his craft.

BOOKS Andrew Lycett's "Ian Fleming" . . . . *Anthony Lane* 148

BRIEFLY NOTED First novels 154

POEMS
"To Whoever Is Reading Me" . . . . *Jorge Luis Borges* 68
"Psychoanalysis" . . . . *Howard Moss* 102
"Personae" . . . . *Richard Wilbur* 131

SHOUTS & MURMURS Writing Is Easy! . . . . *Steve Martin* 156

COVER *Tunnel of Love, by Owen Smith*

DRAWINGS *Roz Chast, Bruce Eric Kaplan, Edward Koren, Mike Twohy, Mick Stevens, Charles Barsotti, Mischa Richter, Donald Reilly, Bill Woodman, Bruce McCall, Danny Shanahan, Edward Sorel, Michael Maslin, Victoria Roberts, Robert Mankoff, Lee Lorenz, Robert Weber, Tom Cheney, Arnie Levin, Leo Cullum*

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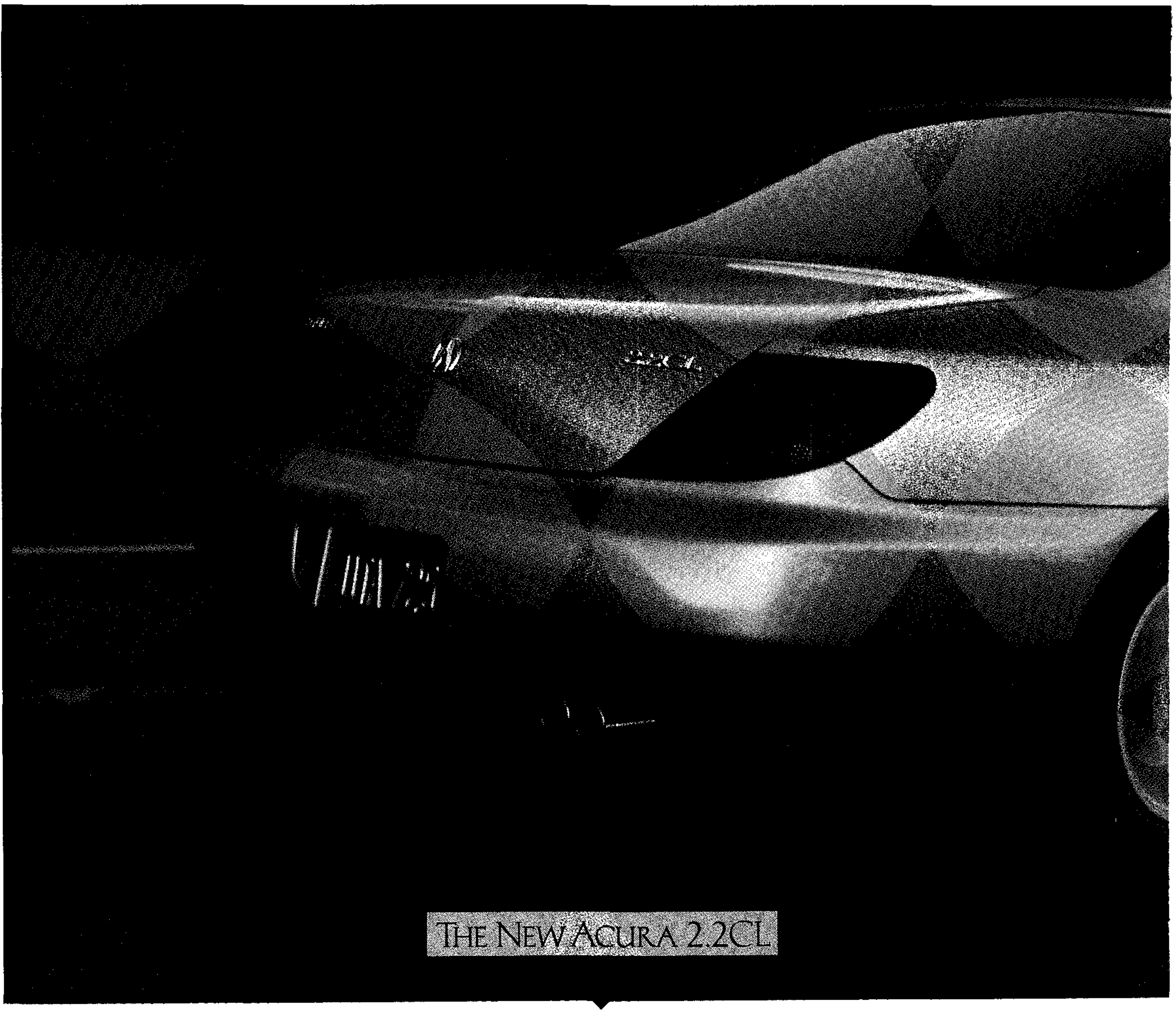

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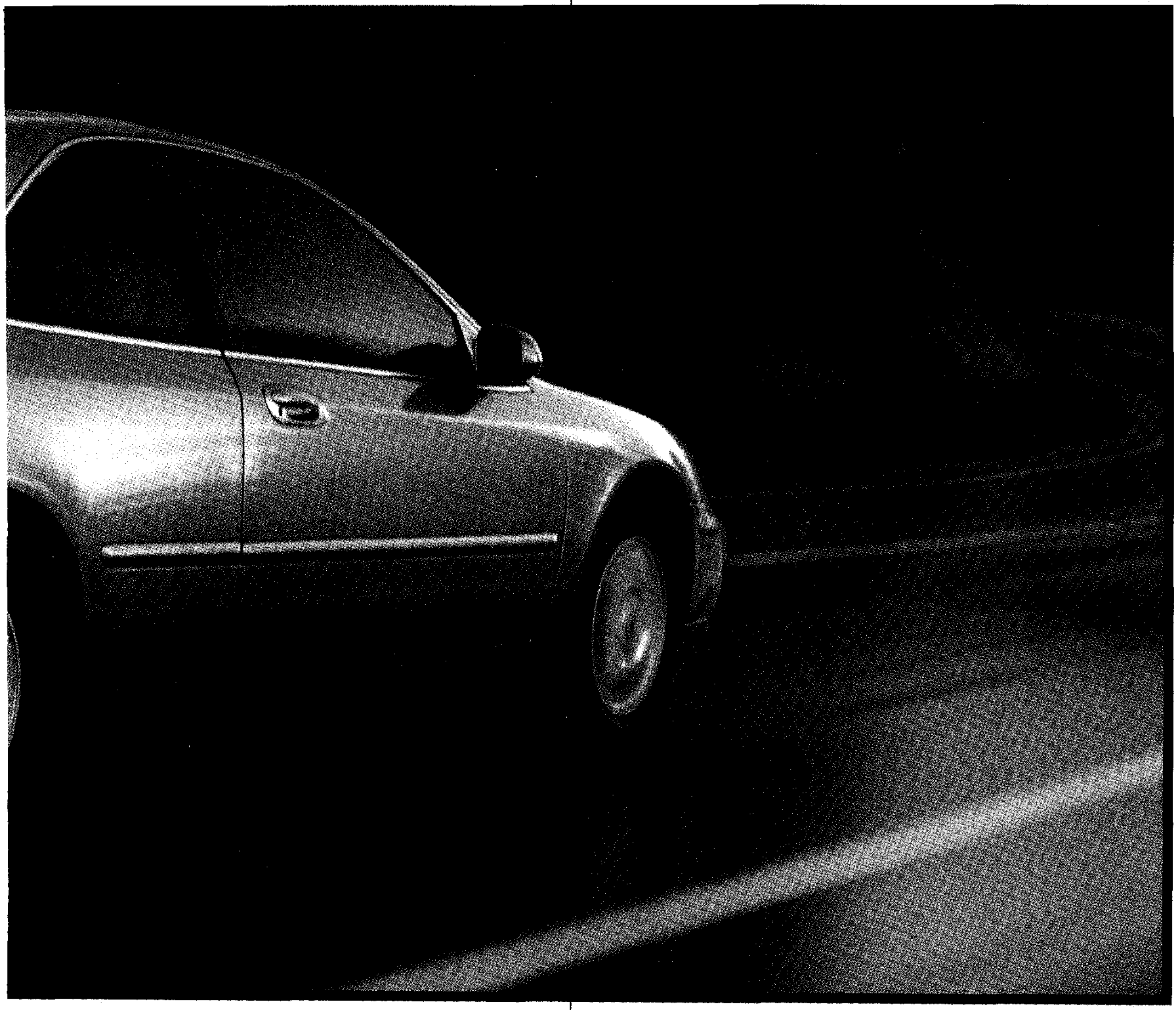

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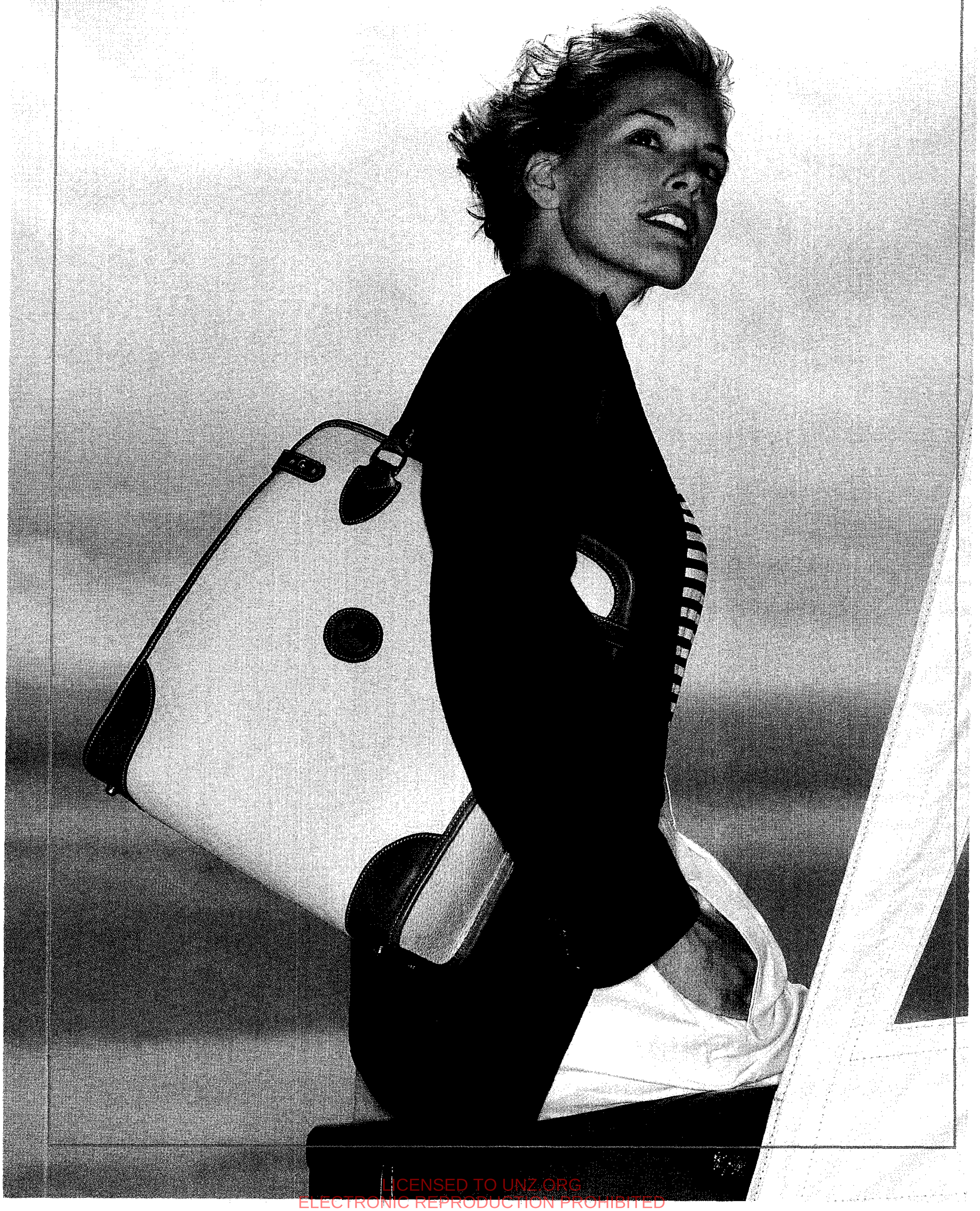

COMMENT

THE SEDUCTIONS OF STORYTELLING

Why is narrative suddenly so popular?

AROUND 1910, according to Virginia Woolf, human nature changed. If so, it must have gone and changed back again—five years ago, maybe, or the day before yesterday.

Woolf's claim was about modernism and art and all those heady theories that people were starting to propose to explain why books no longer had plots, portraits didn't look like people, and plays seemed to be about nothing at all. By 1910, the argument went, the world could no longer enjoy the certainties of the previous century, and the consequence for the novel was that many of its familiar features—plot, character, narrative—were seen to be contrived. Real life was too complex and elusive to be captured in a conventional story.

Modernism is now museum shows with impossible queues, and photographs of authors in stiff collars, but many of its assumptions endure. One is how we think about "stories": they're still not quite high art. Where's the story? the prototype producer is meant to bark, as if to say: Give me tears and belly laughs and heartbreak. I got the story, the journalist says: I got the goods, the headline, the scoop. A reader who reads for plot—who wants story—is a reader uninterested in refinement: stuff, not style. In the one thousand three hundred and eighty-three pages of "The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics," which is the received dictionary of literary terms, you can find "parody," "prosimetrum," and "pun," but there's no entry for "story"—not even a cross-reference, as in "cf. airport reading, Random House v. Joan Collins, and John Grisham."

Storytelling is still somehow not serious, yet it is probably more popular now than at any time since Woolf pronounced it dead. There is, it seems, a narrative revival. It's as if we woke up to discover that everyone was sounding different—accountants talked only in iambic pentameter, Peter Jennings delivered the news in Urdu, the cabdrivers all spoke English. The revival is so sudden and so surprising that many of its practitioners seem to be a little embarrassed about it.

Last month saw the publication of "Law's Stories: Narrative and Rhetoric in the Law," a collection of essays occasioned by a trend scarcely known outside the legal profession: the new movement of narrative law. Narrative law self-consciously uses stories to argue cases, when the practice in the past would have been to stick to more "rational" methods—argument, precedent, the scientific presentation of evidence. "Law's Stories" exhibits many of the same disputes that storytelling has engendered elsewhere: the familiar defen-

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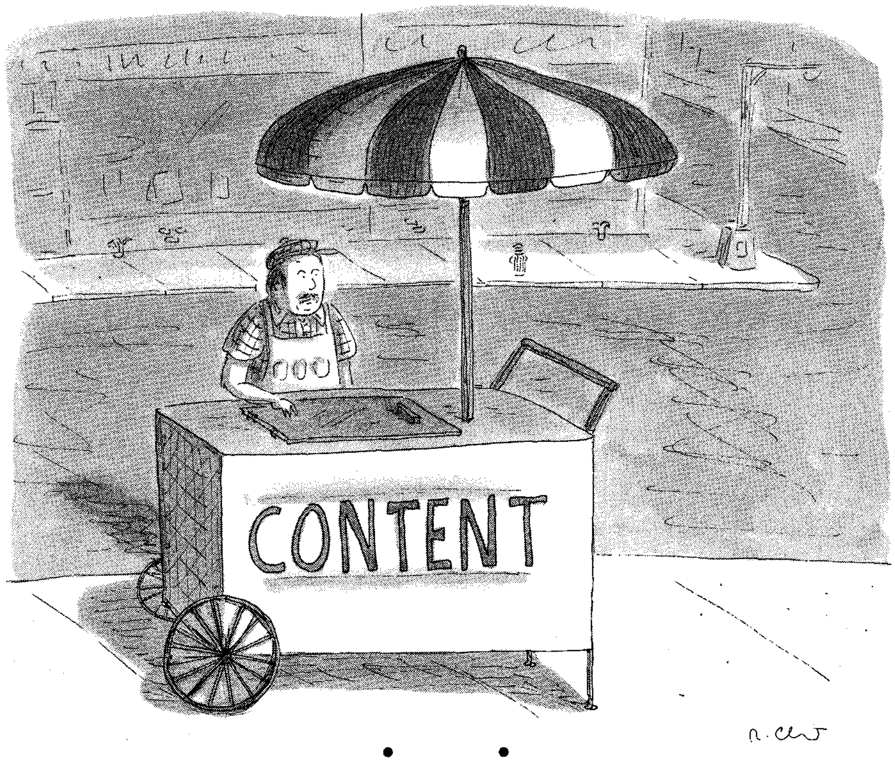


siveness (narrative law, one of the editors awkwardly suggests, might be a good thing for racial and religious minorities, and for women) and the familiar modernist complaint ("Human experience," Alan M. Dershowitz declares, "cannot be cabined into the structure of narrative"). One contributor, Robert Weisberg, cites a corollary trend in historical writing: that the last ten or fifteen years have witnessed a revival of narrative there, too—history as story, rather than history as sociology or statistics. (Lawrence Stone, Jonathan Spence, Sean Wilentz, and Simon Schama might be seen as some of history's new storytellers.) Weisberg could have also cited a corollary trend in science writing—Oliver Sacks is the undisputed master there. He could have mentioned the revival of that great nineteenth-century model of narrative science the case history. And, of course, he could have cited an even more conspicuous trend—the "new" literary nonfiction.

The "new" literary nonfiction is evident in a highly discernible trend toward peculiar first-person narratives, some recent examples being Mary Karr's account of growing up with a wacko mother ("The Liars' Club"), Tobias Wolff's story of growing up without his wacko father ("This Boy's Life"), and Michael Ryan's relentless confessional about being just plain wacko himself ("Secret Life"). Many more could be cited, such as Tim Parks's elegant morality tale on adultery and Jo Ann Beard's startling "The Fourth State of Matter"—both deliberately added to this special fiction issue of *The New Yorker* for what they reveal about the narrative process. The question that many (James Atlas in the *Times*, for instance, and George Steiner in a lecture given earlier this year) have felt tempted to ask is this: Have these nonfiction narratives taken the place of fiction? Is it possible, as such a question implies, that historians, social scientists, lawyers, neurologists, behaviorial scientists, and memoirists have all returned to writing narrative, but novelists haven't?

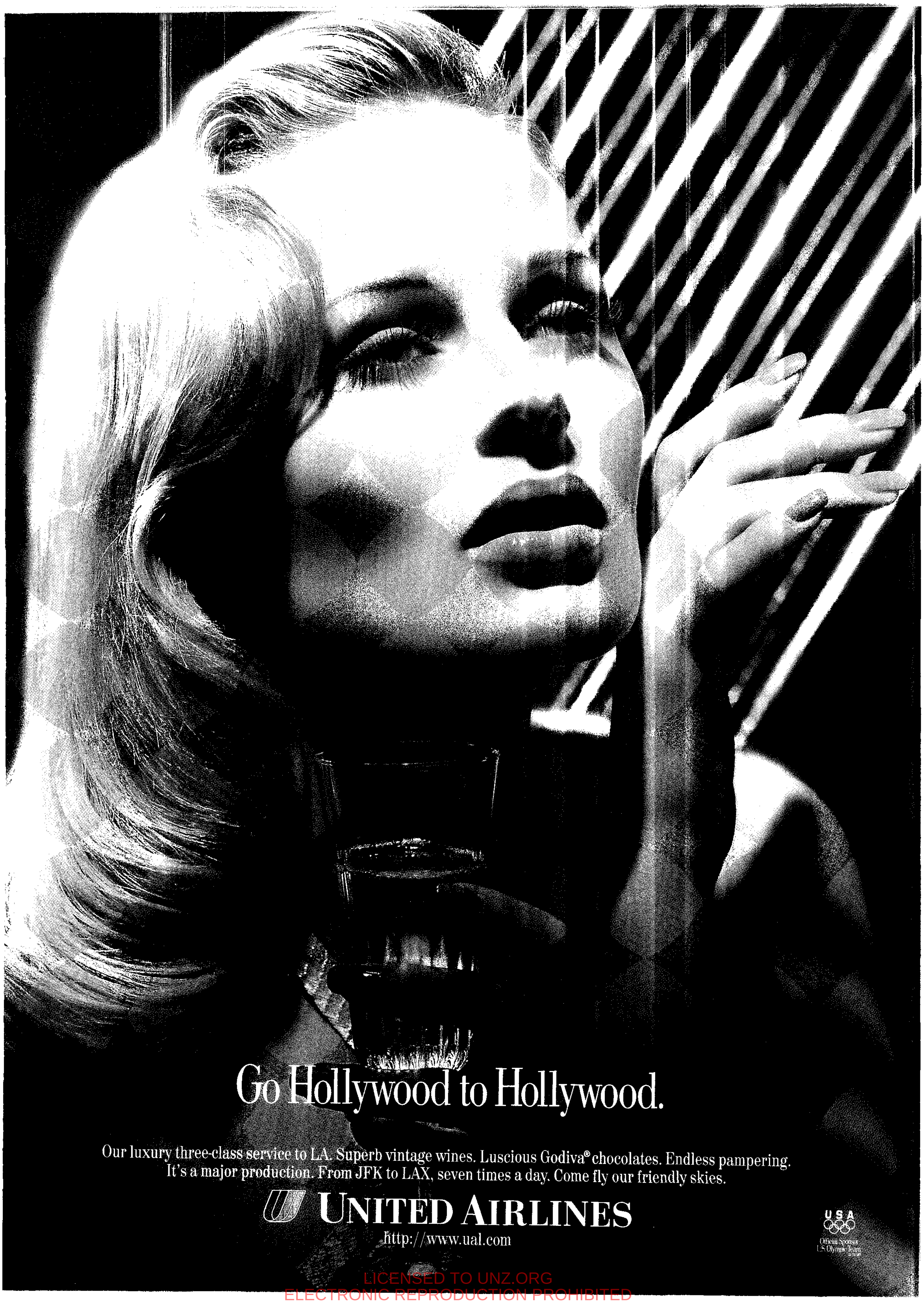
Perhaps it is literary amnesia. Perhaps no one wants to remember. But it is valuable to recall just how different fiction is today from twenty or even ten years ago. In 1985, it was still possible to say (and earn tenure for saying) that American fiction is a manifestation of our post-postmodern modernity. Our literary vocabulary included names and phrases like "The Literature of Exhaustion" (to recall John Barth's polemic about spent literary forms), the *nouveau roman*, and simultaneous narratives. (That's two narratives running down two columns on a page to capture—what? the simultaneity of experience, you idiot!) There were stories about stories, there were stories about writing stories, and there were stories about searches for the writers to write the stories. It was art! It was modern! And, finally, it disappeared!

How? When? Was it in 1989, the year when so many other things collapsed? Was it thirteen years before, when Raymond Carver finally published his powerful first collection of highly personal, highly colloquial narratives—"Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?"—and changed the way many people thought about stories? It is not the case that writers of nonfiction have taken over the business of storytelling; the most powerful writers of our time (Don DeLillo, Umberto Eco, Gabriel García Márquez, Toni Morrison, Robert Stone) are at once writers of fiction and unquestionably and fundamentally storytellers. What is much more interesting is that storytelling has taken over the business of writing. A crucial assumption of modernism—that because narrative distorts reality it should be abandoned—has itself been abandoned.

Of the many definitions of story, the simplest may be this: It is a piece of writing that makes the reader want to find out what happens next. Good writers, it is often said, have the ability to make you keep on reading them whether you want to or not—the milk boils over, the subway stop is missed. Strong narrative writing is, at its most elementary, an act of seduction: its object is arousal. It arouses a curiosity, an interest, an expectation. It flirts with the reader, stimulates an appetite, verges on satisfying it, only to stimulate another, even greater appetite—an appetite for more, please, now. Is it really so strange that in the eighteenth century novels were regarded as corrupting, and not the sort of thing that a young woman should be allowed to read on her own? Story means pleasure, as distinct from art; it would rather gratify than edify.

But stories also protect us from chaos, and maybe that's what we, unblinkered at the end of the twentieth century, find ourselves craving. Implicit in the extraordinary revival of storytelling is the possibility that we need stories—that they are a fundamental unit of knowledge, the foundation of memory, essential to the way we make sense of our lives: the beginning, middle, and end of our personal and collective trajectories. It is possible that narrative is as important to writing as the human body is to representational painting. We have returned to narratives—in many fields of knowledge—because it is impossible to live without them.

—BILL BUFORD



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IN THE MAIL

ART AND ANTI-SEMITISM

Ian Parker's Talk of the Town story about Anthony Julius's "T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form" ("Eliot v. Julius," May 20th) barely mentioned the book's most original and controversial critical point. Julius argues that Eliot's anti-Semitism, while thoroughly reprehensible, was nevertheless a vital source of inspiration for his poetry, an invigorating force; he also argues that Eliot managed a successful transformation of bigotry into art—"one of anti-Semitism's few literary triumphs." These insights have larger implications: they suggest that even the most objectionable material can make a positive contribution to the aesthetic value of poetry and art.

JACOB KORG
Seattle, Wash.

Mr. Julius's revisionist critique of T. S. Eliot brought to mind a monologue in Mark Twain's "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." The monologue is delivered by Huck Finn's father, Pap, who is an alcoholic and clearly psychotic. He rants and raves about meeting a black man who spoke good English, wore a white shirt, and was allowed to vote. Pap couldn't get over the insult of the existence of such a man. The speech is one of the most eloquent critiques of racism I've ever come across. But some thin-skinned people missed the irony of the book altogether and declared Twain a racist. We have precious little good literature as it is, and if we eliminate people like Twain and Eliot in the name of political correctness our children will grow up reading nothing but mediocrities.

STEVEN ARNAUDO
Berkeley, Calif.

The article on Anthony Julius's views about T. S. Eliot's anti-Semitism reminded me of some of the critical reaction to Charles Dickens's anti-Semitic writing. As with Eliot, this anti-Semitism was both ignored and vigorously denied by apologists. But as more evidence was revealed (e.g., Dickens's unexpurgated letters), Dickensians began to accept the fact that Dickens did, indeed, hate Jews (at least until the later years of his life). But Dickens's readers, unlike Julius, did not decide that "an anti-Semite is a scoundrel." Perhaps this was because Dickens seemed to be so great as to be irreproachable; perhaps it was simply because they couldn't bring themselves to condemn someone they so loved. Or perhaps it was because they thought it took more than a single conviction, even one so devastatingly wrongheaded and damaging, to make a person a scoundrel. They seem to have decided that Dickens was a man of his time and, like the rest of us, was cursed with flaws we wish he and we didn't have.

RICHARD LETTIS
Port Washington, N.Y.

CORRECTION

It was a pleasure to see the three poems of Katherine Anne Porter in your May 13th issue ("Lights on the River," "Variation 1001," and "Morning Song"), but it must be pointed out that, of all the variations of her name that Katherine Anne used in her long life, "Katharine" was not one.

BARBARA THOMPSON DAVIS
Trustee for the Literary Estate
of Katherine Anne Porter
New York City

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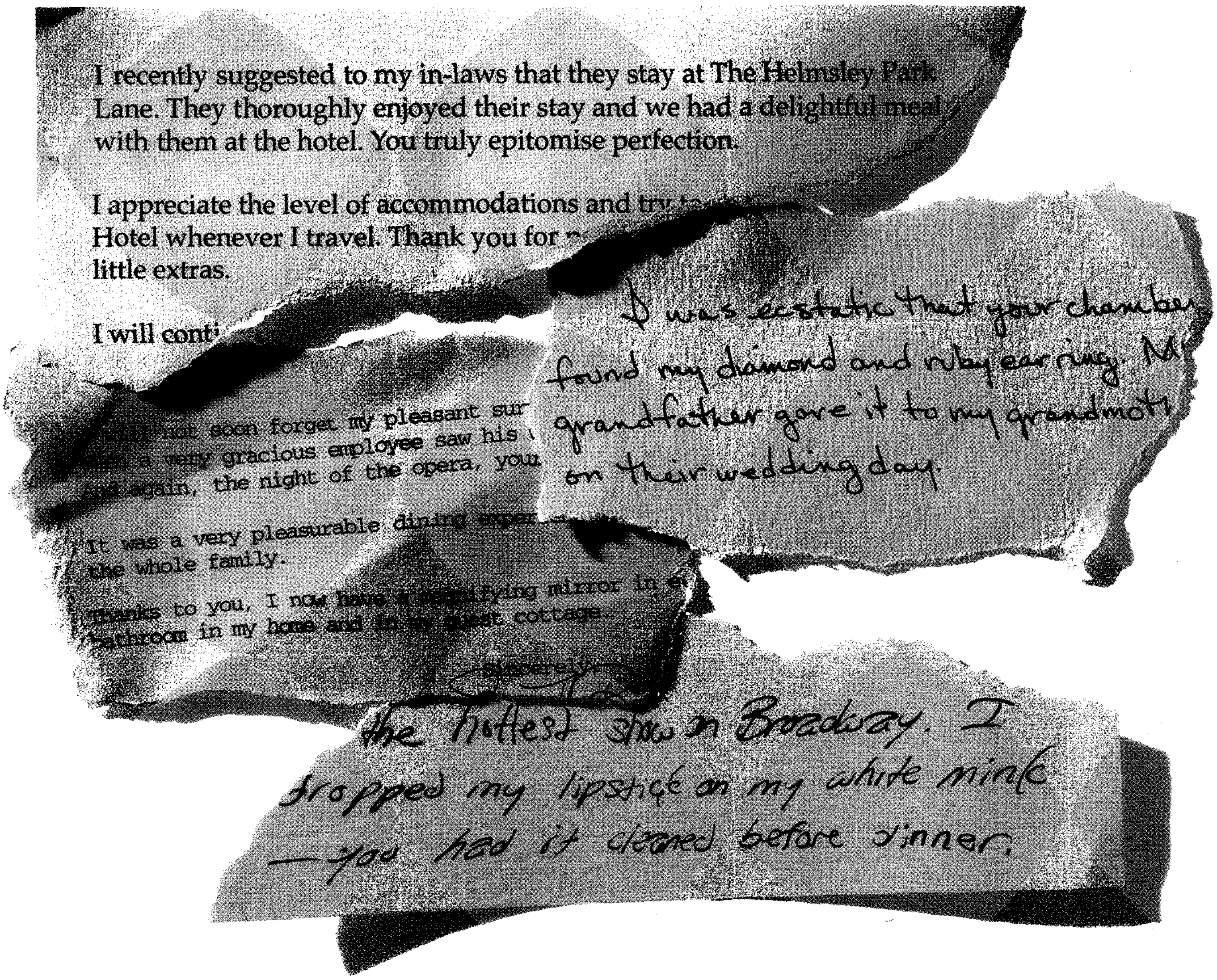

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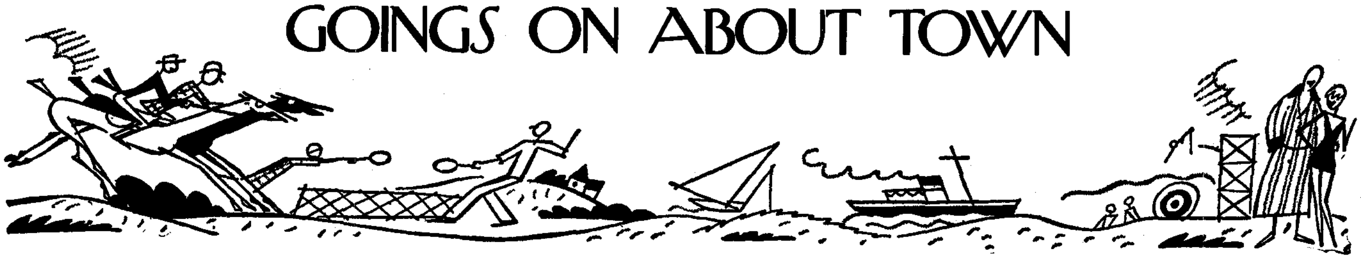

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The Boys in the Band—A revival of Mart Crowley's 1968 play, about a birthday party attended by a group of gay men. David Drake, David Greenspan, and James Lescene are in the cast. Preview on June 19. Opens June 20 at 8. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523.)

Bride Stripped Bare—Kate Robin's new drama, about ambitious New York art-world habitués involved in a love triangle. With Leslie Lyles. Opens June 22 at 8 and continues through July 13. (Thread Waxing Space, 476 Broadway, between Broome and Grand Sts. 334-9594.)

Henry V—André Braugher portrays the King in the summer's first New York Shakespeare Festival production, directed by Douglas Hughes. Previews June 18-29. Opens June 30 at 8. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 539-8750.)

Lolita—Jeremy Irons reads from Nabokov's novel. June 24 at 7:30. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Marin Mazzie and Steven Skybell, in "The Trojan Women: A Love Story."

Louisiana Purchase—The 1939 Irving Berlin musical, in a concert performance directed by Rob Fisher and starring Judy Blazer, George S. Irving, and Michael McGrath. June 19 at 7, June 20-22 at 8, and June 23 at 3 and 8. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)

A Midsummer Night's Dream—The first of two outdoor productions by the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival, directed by Terrence O'Brien. In previews June 26-28. Opens June 29 at 8. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. For ticket information and directions, call 1-914 265-9575.)

The Shawl—Cynthia Ozick's new drama, about two Holocaust survivors and a charismatic revisionist historian, stars Dianne Wiest, Boyd Gaines, and Wendy Makkena and is directed by Sidney Lumet. Presented by the Jewish Repertory Theatre. Two previews on June 19. Opens June 20 at 8 and runs through June 30. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

A Thousand Clowns—The 1962 comedy by Herb Gardner, starring Judd Hirsch, Marin Hinkle, and David Margulies. Scott Ellis is the director. In previews. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

The Trojan Women: A Love Story—Marin Mazzie, Tom Nelis, Sharon Scruggs, and Steven Skybell are in the cast of En Garde Arts' new site-specific production—a variation, with music, on the Greek tragedy. Written by Charles L. Mee, Jr., and directed by Tina Landau. The site is the ruins of the East River Park Amphitheatre. In previews through June 26. Opens June 27 at 8 and continues through July 14. (F.D.R. Drive and Grand St. For information and tickets, call 279-4200.)

Your Arms Too Short to Box with God—The 1975 musical based on the Gospel According to St. Matthew arrives in town for a short run, with Teddy Pendergrass, Stephanie Mills, and BeBe Winans. Opens June 19 at 8 and runs through June 30. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Ancient History—A comedy-drama by David Ives, in which Ruth and Jack (Vivienne Benesch and Michael Rupert), a thirty-something couple who are, as they put it, "tall, thin, and funny," show that two people who are too clever by half are likely to end up divided. Unfortunately, the twosome is tedious, and the play, unlike the relationship, goes on forever. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes June 23.)

Baal—The Independent Theatre Company's energetic staging of Brecht's first play. (House of Candles Theatre, 99 Stanton St. 353-3088. Closes June 22.)

Big—This adaptation of the movie that starred Tom Hanks and Elizabeth Perkins provides little joy, though Daniel Jenkins, as the twelve-year-old in a grownup's body, is sweet and likable. The dance numbers are full of grimly talented, grinning kiddies—it's like a midget minstrel show—the score is melodically challenged, and the patronizing book has lost all the movie's charm and poignancy. Directed by Mike Ockrent. (Reviewed in our issue of 5/27/96.) (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Bring In da Noise, Bring In da Funk—Director George C. Wolfe and dancer-choreographer Savion Glover's heroically energetic African-American musical. (5/20/96) (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

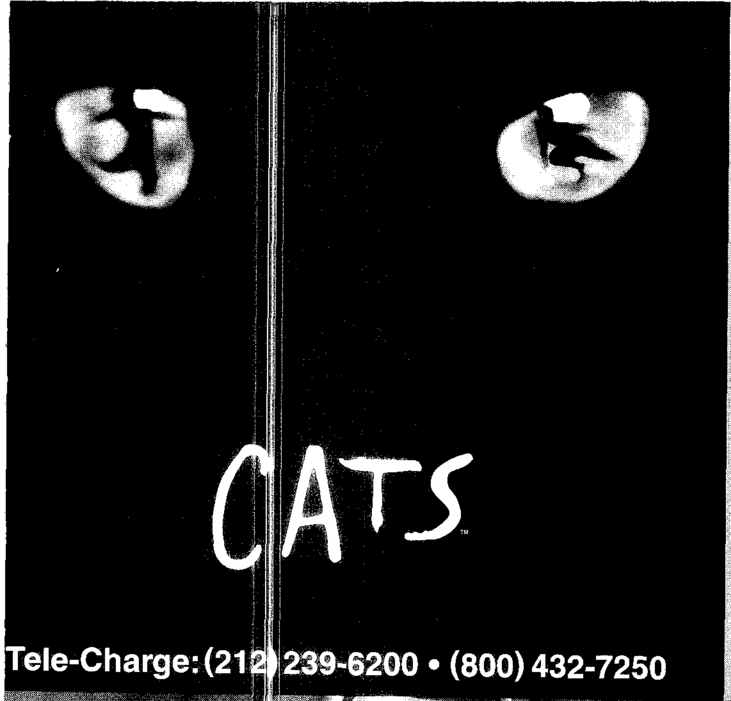
Buried Child—Sam Shepard's 1978 play, directed by Gary Sinise, comes by way of Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre. It takes place in the heartland, in the filthy living room of a family with a horrible secret, and forces you to look—for three long hours—at the ugly facts of family life. Sinise has brought the laughs to the forefront, but when the laughs aren't there you feel as though you were in a theatrical Dust Bowl, waiting for the irritating, monotonous wind to stop. (5/27/96) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 719-4099 Closes June 30.)

By the Sea, by the Sea, by the Beautiful Sea—Three summery one-acts set on the same beach at three different times of day. The writers drew straws, and Joe Pintauro ended up with dawn, Lanford Wilson with noon, and Terrence McNally with dusk. The results are three clever and engaging mini-dramas that make you wonder whether what Jane Austen really said was that everything happens on beaches. Under the direction of Leonard Foglia, who first staged the works last summer at the Bay Street Theatre, in Sag Harbor, the three cast members—Mary Beth Fisher, Timothy Carhart, and Lee Brock—do very well with their various roles. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes June 30.)

Cowgirls—By the end of this appealing, if somewhat predictable, musical comedy, three chamber musicians have been transformed into fringe-wearin', honky-tonkin' cowgirls. Mary Murfitt, the show's composer and lyricist, is hilarious as an uptight violinist learning how to shake it. Betsy Howie, who wrote the book, is also in the fine cast. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

Curtains—The young director Scott Elliott, who did outstanding ensemble work last year with Mike Leigh's "Ecstasy," has done it again with this coal-black comedy by the English playwright Stephen Bill, set in a drab middle-class living room in Birmingham. The play begins with a birthday party for Ida (Kathleen Claypool), who has just turned eighty-six, and wastes no time in presenting us with the not very pretty realities of old age and the discomfort and ambivalence that the elderly cause in

MAXINE HENRYSON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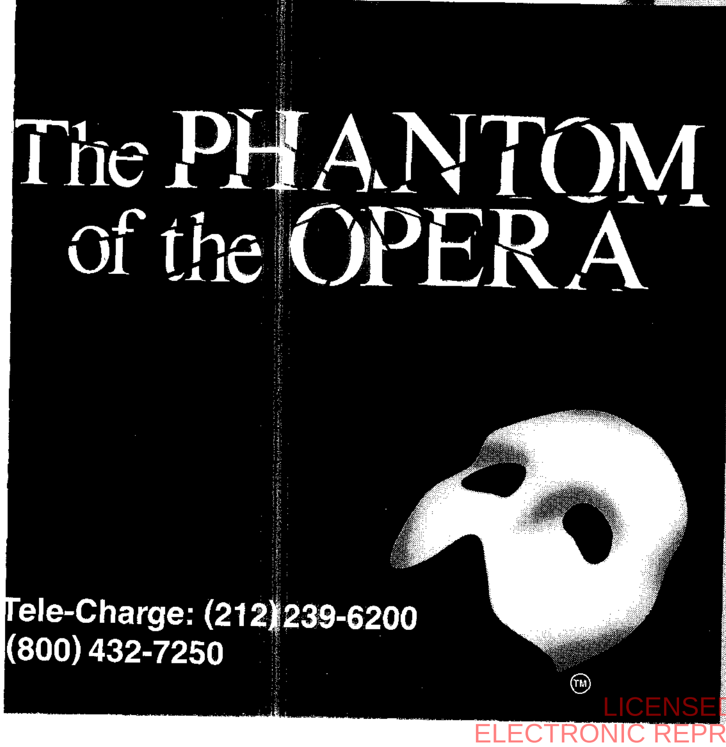
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others. The six actors who play the members of Ida's family (among them Jayne Haynes, Laura Esterman, and David Cale) all distinguish themselves with vivid characterizations, and Betty Miller is wonderful as a helpful and extremely annoying neighbor. (6/10/96) (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 339-6200.)

A Delicate Balance—Decorous suburban ennui is transformed into real angst in this bracing, astringent revival of Edward Albee's 1966 play about a family that has sacrificed much of its humanity for the sake of appearances. The cast, under the fine direction of Gerald Gutierrez, is uniformly excellent. (5/27/96) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

A Fair Country—A neatly packaged but hollow new play by Jon Robin Baitz, about an American diplomat in South Africa. (3/11/96) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes June 30.)

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum—Burt Shevelove, Larry Gelbart, and Stephen Sondheim's 1962 musical-comedy version of a Roman farce is a joke play that begs for outrageousness, but Jerry Zaks's peppy, acrylic revival seldom enters that giddy zone of comic daring. (5/20/96) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Gaol Gate and **Purgatory**—The National Asian American Theatre Company's season finale: one-acts by Lady Gregory and W. B. Yeats. (Vineyard's 26th Street Theatre, 309 E. 26th St. 505-3003. Closes June 30.)

An Ideal Husband—In Oscar Wilde's hundred-and-one-year-old play, a youthful transgression comes back to threaten the career of a promising Cabinet member. The man who saves the day is played, with showy aplomb, by Martin Shaw. The rest of the delightful, mostly British cast, under the direction of Peter Hall, is well up to the Wildean wit and wisdom, and the evening flies by in a flash of epigrammatic splendor. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

Ivanov—Victor Slezak has the title role in Chekhov's 1887 play. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 945-8020. Closes June 23.)

The King and I—In a word, magnificent. Hats off to Donna Murphy, as Anna, Lou Diamond Phillips, as the King of Siam, and everyone else (including Rodgers and Hammerstein, of course) who had a hand in this production. Christopher Renshaw directed. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

Kingdom of Earth—A Drama Dept. staging of Tennessee Williams's 1968 play, starring Cynthia Nixon and directed by John Cameron Mitchell. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 629-4656. Closes June 30.)

Love Thy Neighbor—Jackie Mason's latest two-hour monologue: his range may be limited, but his timing is perfect, and the house rocks with laughter. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Making Porn—Rex Chandler has the role of the straight star Jack Hawk in Ronnie Larsen's play about the gay-porn business. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 239-6200.)

La Mama—June 20-22 at 7: Final performances of Charles Allcroft's fairy tale "Snow Man Serenade." . . ¶ June 20-22 and June 27-29 at 10: Final performances of "The Ballad of June Cool," a noirish one-woman melodrama starring Laura Kenyon as a fifties jazz singer. Directed by Thommie Walsh. . . . ¶ June 20-22 and June 27-29 at 8 and June 23 and June 30 at 3 and 8: "Times Square Motel," four short magic-realist plays set in the same shabby room, by Charles E. Drew, Jr. . . . ¶ June 27-30 at 7: "Ruby and the Rednecks: Singin' in the Islands," a hula musical by Ruby Lynn Reyner. (74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

A Park in Our House—In Nilo Cruz's lovely, bittersweet play about life in Cuba in the nineteen-seventies, an ad-hoc family (Vanessa Aspillaga, Joe Quintero, Franca Barchiesi, Gary Perez, and Shawn Elliott) and their Russian visitor (James Colby) bring to life a microcosm of a society warped by Stalinism. Cruz doesn't hit you over the head, though: enhanced by the fine cast's subtle performances and by Robert Brill's evocative set, the play unfolds as gently as a memory and rises above the merely political. Directed by Loretta Greco. (79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes June 30.)

Jeremy Irons reads from "Lolita."

N. ASCENCIOS

Radio Mambo: Culture Clash Invades Miami—Springing from a series of interviews the Latino comedy troupe Culture Clash conducted with residents of Dade County, Florida, these character sketches don't so much build to a point as pile up in a heap. The evening is funny in some spots, dull in others, and, owing to some expendable dance numbers, longer than it ought to be. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Rent—The late Jonathan Larson's rock opera, inspired by Puccini's "La Bohème," stands every assumption of the traditional musical on its head. It can't support the narrative overload (eight separate stories are told), yet by the end of the evening Larson's talent has taken the audience to places the musical never ventures these days. (2/19/96) (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.)

Seven Guitars—August Wilson's exciting new play, which flashes back to the final days of a Pittsburgh blues singer (Keith David), sends us stirring news of black life in the late forties. The seven guitars of the title are the seven memorable characters whose high times and dashed dreams Wilson turns into beautiful, complex music—a funky, wailing, irresistible Chicago blues. Lloyd Richards is the director. (4/15/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You—Christopher Durang's 1979 comedy, starring Geraldine Librandi and directed by Mark Cannistraro. Saturdays at 8, through July 6. (Duplex, 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. S. 255-5438.)

State Fair—This lively, colorful stage version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1945 movie musical is a pleasure, despite some weak perfomances in key roles. Co-directed by James Hammerstein (son of) and Randy Skinner, who also did the choreography. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Tartuffe: Born Again—In setting her contemporary adaptation of Molière's comedy in "the American South"—a place not unlike Petticoat Junction, apparently—Freyda Thomas reaches so far beyond farce and satire that she ends up with a cartoon. The actors are talented enough, though, to embrace their cartoonishness. David Schramm, especially, has some Gleasonesque moments as Orgon, a pigheaded TV-studio owner whose blind devotion to the titular televangelist (played, with a bit too much whine in his voice, by the charismatic John Glover) nearly destroys his life. As Orgon's wife, Haviland Morris is a beautiful and enigmatic object of Tartuffe's lust; her resistance scene is one of the play's funniest bits. And the seemingly boneless Kevin Dewey is part cyclone, part ticking bomb as Orgon's whistle-blowing son. Directed by David Saint. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200. Closes June 23.)

Tokyo Can Can—A musical set in Japan shortly after the Second World War, written and directed by Yutaka Okada. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 307-4100. Closes June 22.)

Valley Song—The South African playwright Athol Fugard's latest drama has returned to Manhattan Theatre Club. With LisaGay Hamilton and Marius Weyers. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes June 23.)

Virgins and Other Myths—Colin Martin's one-man show—a sort of "This Gay Boy's Life." (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

We'll Meet Again—Vicki Stuart, in a one-woman musical memoir about her childhood in England during the Second World War. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes June 30.)

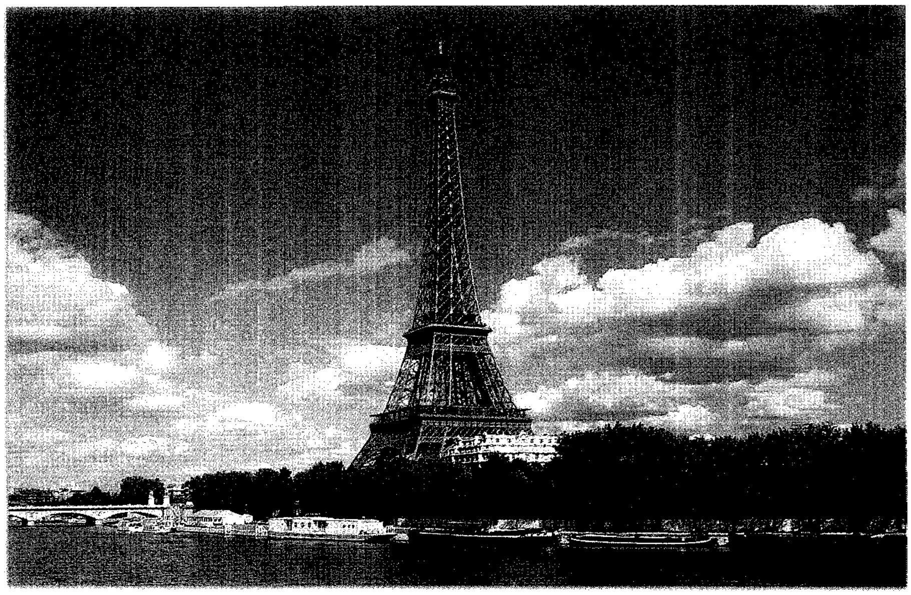
LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **MASTER CLASS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **MRS. KLEIN:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. (Closes June 29.) . . . **MOON OVER BUFFALO:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. (Closes June 30.) . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **ROB BECKER'S DEFENDING THE CAVEMAN:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100. . . . **SHOW BOAT:** Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—Final performances of the season. June 19 at 8: "Twilight," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Quatre," "Moves," and "Fearful Symmetries." . . . ¶ June 20 at 8: "Interplay," "Concertino," "Behind the China Dogs," and "Chaconne." . . . ¶ June 21 at 8: "Touch," "Behind the China Dogs," and "Chaconne." . . . ¶ June 22 at 2: "Donizetti Variations," "Ancient Airs and Dances," and "La Sonnambula." . . . ¶ June 22 at 8: "Touch," "Interplay," "Concertino," and "Cortège Hongrois." . . . ¶ June 23 at 3: "Donizetti Variations," "Badchonim," and "La Sonnambula." . . . ¶ June 25-28 at 8, June 29 at 2 and 8, and June 30 at 3: "A Midsummer Night's Dream." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

American Ballet Theatre—Final performances of the season. June 19 at 2: "Ballet Imperial," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "The Nutcracker Pas de Deux," "Rose Adagio," and "The Sleeping Beauty, Act III." . . . ¶ June 19 at 8:



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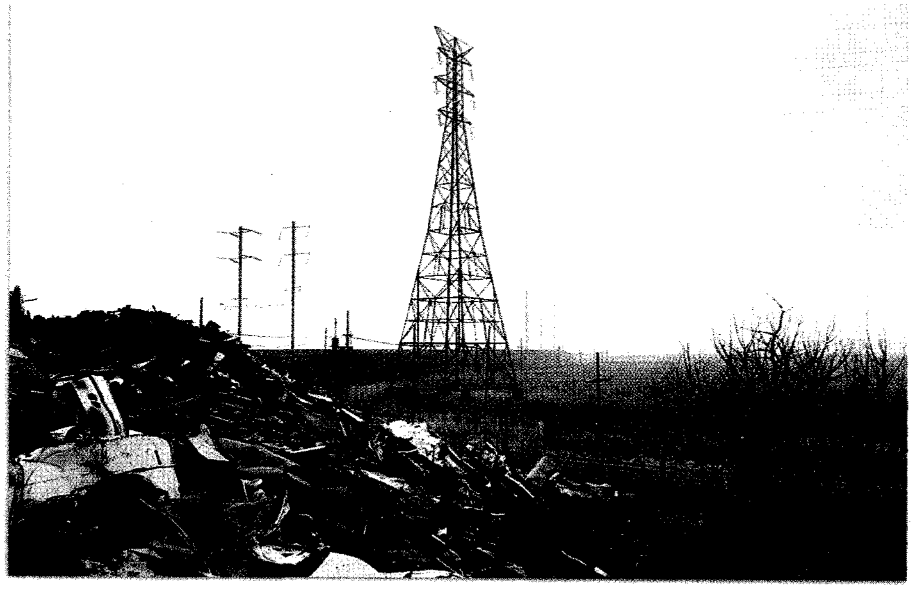

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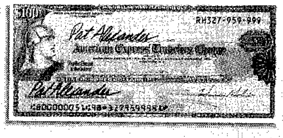

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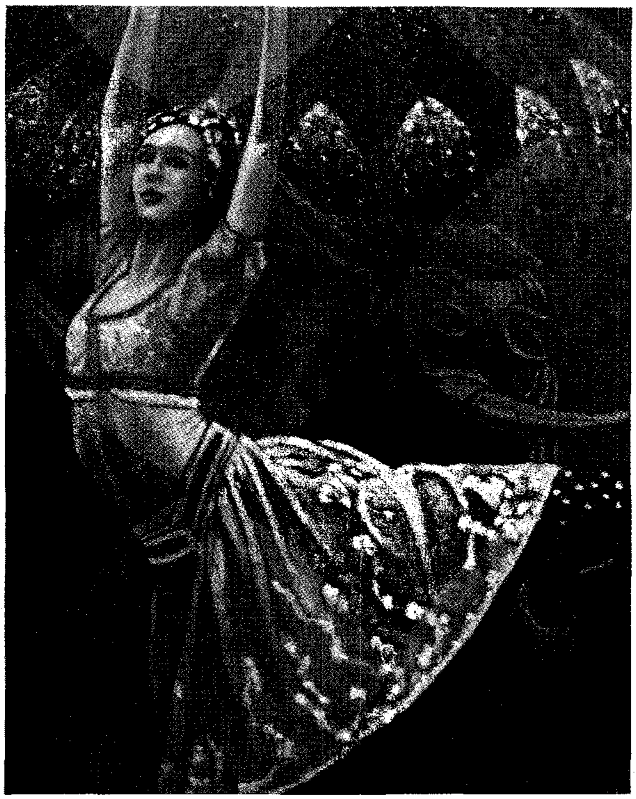
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Apollo," "Stepping Stones," and "The Sleeping Beauty, Act III." . . . ¶ June 20 at 8: "Apollo," "Stepping Stones," and "A Brahms Symphony." . . . ¶ June 21 at 8 and June 22 at 2 and 8: "Don Quixote." In the June 21 performance, Paloma Herrera and Angel Corella return as Kitri and Vasilio. Since opening the current season as the passionate Spanish lovers, the two have demonstrated their dazzling fit in the classical "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux" and in Twyla Tharp's lyrical "Americans We." They can make their battling bravura—her fluttery arabesques, his zippy pirouettes—feel like a matching youthful impulse. Both Herrera and Corella are twenty—he's still hoping to grow an inch or two. "We're young, we enjoy, we have energy," Corella said recently, adding gallantly, "Paloma does it all by herself. I don't have to do anything." (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)



Isabelle Guérin of the Paris Opera Ballet, in "La Bayadère."

MILES HYMAN

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company—The twelve-member troupe in repertory works and four premières. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. June 18-22 at 8 and June 23 at 2 and 7:30.)

Paris Opera Ballet—Rudolf Nureyev's first performances in Paris and his last working days there were devoted to the same vehicle: Marius Petipa's "La Bayadère." First performed in 1877, this exotic classic (with a score by Ludwig Minkus) was one of the French-born choreographer's greatest successes, yet it was unseen in the West until 1961, on the Kirov tour that sparked the pantherine young Rudi's sensational defection. He later produced the ballet's famous "Shades" scene in London and Paris, but the complete 1992 production that the Paris Opera Ballet now brings for the first time to New York (with a full slate of *étoiles*) was Nureyev's final word on classicism, a sumptuous last hurrah incorporating his incomparable flair for the Oriental and his distinctive St. Petersburg style. In tribute, the opening-night performance will be danced by the Paris première cast, with Patrick Dupond in a rare appearance as the Bronze Idol. . . . ¶ June 24-25 and June 27 at 8; June 26, June 29, and July 3 at 2 and 8: "La Bayadère." . . . ¶ June 28 and July 1-2 at 8: "Le Parc," by the choreographer Angelin Preljocaj. (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

A propitious confluence of free concerts (Central Park SummerStage, Celebrate Brooklyn) and jazz festivals (JVC, the Knitting Factory's What Is Jazz?), plus the usual mother lode of club gigs, makes these weeks two of the busiest we've seen in years. For more information about the JVC Jazz festival, call 501-1390; about What Is Jazz?, call 219-3006; about SummerStage, call 360-2777; and about Celebrate Brooklyn, call 1-718 855-7882, ext. 52.

Art Ensemble of Chicago—The A.E.C. continues to live up to its motto, "Great Black Music Ancient to the Future," and it's still ready to produce a multicultural mind warp at a moment's notice. Despite the loss of saxophonist Joseph Jarman, these merry pranksters have enough formal skill and genre-bending vision to melt the musical landscape. With Blues for Allah, bassist Joe Gallant's audacious big-band tribute to the Grateful Dead, and Spanish Fly, featuring bebop slide guitarist Dave Tronzo. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. June 19 at 7:30.)

Abbey Lincoln Quartet / Charlie Haden Quartet West / Thomas Chapin Trio—This exceptional triple bill brings together a singer and survivor whose every breath is filled with wisdom, an old-school avant-garde bassist with a romantic soul and a bebop heart, and a saxophonist who walks the line between consonance and dissonance without dissing either side. (Town Hall. June 20 at 8.)

Joe Williams and the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band—The greatest living big-band singer meets one of the greatest living big bands. Williams can moan the blues like Big Joe Turner's half brother or inhabit a sophisticated ballad as if Cole Porter himself had taught him, and he hasn't lost the snap and the bluesy swagger that made him a star with Basie back in the fifties. The Carnegie Hall Band has all the power and precision of the fabled swing ensembles. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. June 21 at 8.)

Music from the Film "Kansas City" and the Terence Blanchard Group—A musical preview of Robert Altman's movie, which features a talented young cast including Nicholas Payton, Cyrus Chestnut, and James Carter, all of whom will perform. As for Blanchard, he's the only mainstream trumpeter who can make Wynton Marsalis sweat. With the Paradox Trio, who will play an accompaniment to Buñuel and Dali's "Un Chien Andalou." (Town Hall. June 21 at 8.)

Crosby, Stills, and Nash / Chicago—All happy families are alike. (Jones Beach Theatre. 1-516 221-1000. June 21-22 at 8.)

Dixie Hummingbirds—Along with the Golden Gate Quartet, this legendary a-cappella group helped introduce Southeastern jubilee singing to mass audiences back in the late nineteen-thirties; they're probably best known to pop fans for their work with Paul Simon on "Loves Me Like a Rock" (1973). With the remarkable tenor Ira Tucker still on lead vocals after nearly sixty years, they're as formidable as ever. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. June 22 at 3.)

Chico Science and Nação Zumbi—Música from Brazil. (Prospect Park Bandshell, Brooklyn. June 22 at 7.)

Mel Tormé—Singer, actor, author, arranger, songwriter, drummer, movie buff, and old-gun collector, the Velvet Fog is the latest passenger on the I'm-gonna-be-cool-with-those-kids bandwagon (thanks in part to a Mountain Dew commercial and an appearance on "Seinfeld"). The eternal enfant terrible began singing professionally around the time he hit kindergarten; as with many a terrible infant (Mickey Rooney, Sammy Davis, Jr., Orson Welles, et al.), you either dig him or you don't. But his gifts are undeniable, and at seventy he's still in command of that warm, fluid baritone and aggressively hip delivery. Joining him will be a few additional perennials: Hank Jones, Milt Jackson, Harry (Sweets) Edison, and Frank Wess. (Carnegie Hall. June 22 at 8.)

Wilson Pickett / Solomon Burke—His dirty mind and dangerous allure earned him the nickname the Wicked Pickett, but this Alabama-born singer has always been more than a dance on the dark side. Rhino Records recently released "A Man and a Half" (another great nickname), an anthology that proves that he was never just a one-dimensional belter. Supported by the legendary Muscle Shoals band, he obliterated laid-back Southern R. & B. with frenetic material—"Mustang Sally," "Ninety-Nine and a Half"—and he could work through a ballad like "Hey Jude" (recommended to him by Duane Allman) with a convincing delicacy. At fifty-four he's still a powerhouse, and when he tears into "Funky Broadway" the result should be pandemonium. / In the early sixties, thanks to gospel-influenced material like "Cry to Me," Burke became one of the bedrocks of soul music, and his cachet was enhanced when the Stones covered some of his classics. With more than twenty children and a career that just won't quit, he's the George Foreman of soul. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. June 22 at 8.)

Ryuichi Sakamoto—The work of this great Japanese keyboardist, actor, and composer first fell upon Western ears in the late seventies, when he was a member of the Yellow Magic Orchestra, one of the original techno-pop acts. On more than fifteen solo albums, he's tackled everything from funk to chamber music and collaborated with, among others, David Byrne, David Sylvian, Sly Dunbar, and Thomas Dolby; "Beauty" (1990), his best pop record, includes, along with his standard allotment of internationally renowned musicians, backing vocals by Brian Wilson. But Sakamoto is perhaps most celebrated for his haunting film scores, particularly the David Bowie–Tom Conti vehicle, "Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence" (in which he also appeared), and "The Last Emperor" (for which he won an Oscar); they showcase his evocative hybridization of Asian themes and European harmonies, a sound that continues to evolve on his excellent new record, "1996." With **Caetano Veloso**, the Brazilian avant-pop star. An inspired double bill. (Central Park SummerStage. June 23 at 3.)

"The Legacy of Woody Herman"—Herman was the Rambo of big-band jazz. Before his death in 1987, nothing could stop him—not the end of the Swing Era, not the advent of rock, and certainly not personal adversity. Paying tribute to his perseverance and the trademark vigor of his bands will be a number of former colleagues, including Anita O'Day, Buddy DeFranco, Terry Gibbs, and Urbie Green, along with the Woody Herman Orchestra, directed by Frank Tiberi. (Carnegie Hall. June 23 at 8.)

David Sanborn / Michel Camilo—The alto saxophonist and the exuberant Dominican pianist. (Avery Fisher Hall. June 23 at 8.)

Maria Schneider and the Gil Evans Orchestra—Evans, the incomparable modern arranger, receives a tribute from one of his most gifted students. The first part of the program features Schneider's own band and compositions; in the second, she conducts the Gil Evans Orchestra in some of Evans's classic scores, including his arrangements for Miles Davis's "Sketches of Spain." (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. June 23 at 8.)

Tal Farlow Tribute—When it comes to bop guitar, no one can touch Farlow, the reclusive

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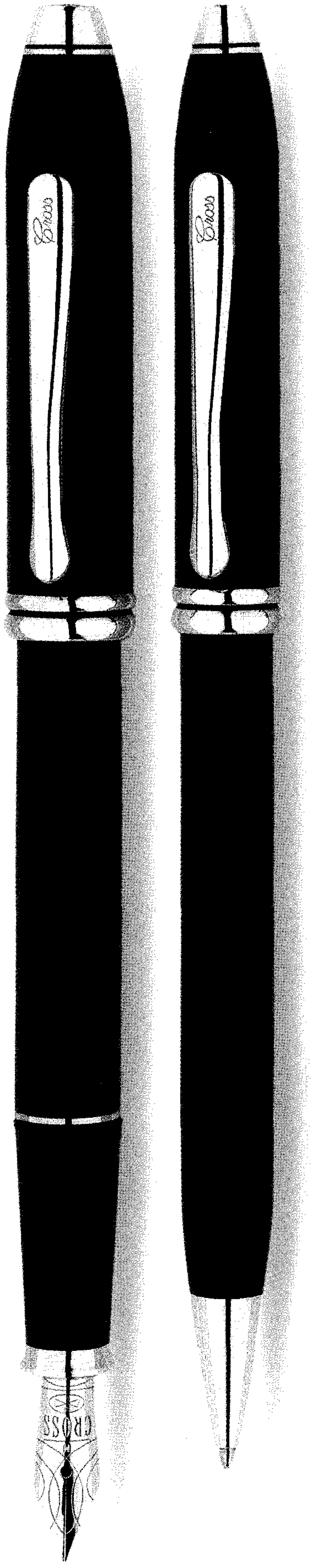

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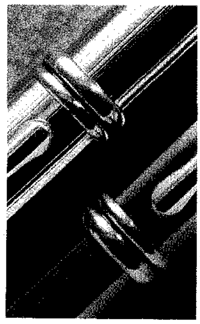

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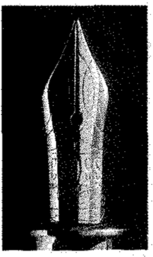

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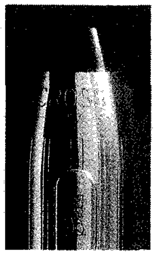

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CHICK COREA AND FRIENDS—Corea on piano, drum legend Roy Haynes, bass phenom Christian McBride, and two highly touted young hornmen, saxophonist Joshua Redman and trumpeter Wallace Rooney—all singing the praises of the father of bop piano, Bud Powell. (Carnegie Hall. June 25 at 8.)

ARETHA FRANKLIN—If the current crop of R. & B. divas spent a little time with a copy of "Aretha's Gold" (1969), they might better appreciate the concept of using one's voice in the service of a song rather than the other way around. It was gospel that first allowed Miss Re to harness her prodigious talents (this year marks the fortieth anniversary of her début, "The Gospel Sounds of Aretha Franklin"), and gospel remains the straw that stirs her drink. To witness Lady Soul in concert is to become part of her congregation. (Carnegie Hall. June 26 at 8.)

RACHELLE FERRELL / DIANNE REEVES—Two jazz divas. (Carnegie Hall. June 27 at 8.)

LITTLE BUSTER & THE SOUL BROTHERS—Blues in the park. (Prospect Park Bandshell, Brooklyn. June 28 at 7.)

"HERBIE & AHMAD"—Hancock, perhaps the most influential contemporary jazz pianist, appears with an acoustic group worthy of him: bassist Dave Holland, drummer Gene Jackson, and saxophonist Craig Handy. The influence of the veteran pianist Ahmad Jamal has been steadily creeping into the playing of more than a few contemporary keyboardists; now the quirky master will show them how it's done. (Carnegie Hall. June 28 at 8.)

"VIVA BRAZIL"—An evening with guitarist Paulinho da Viola and vocalist Zizi Possi. (Avery Fisher Hall. June 28 at 8.)

JOAN ARMATRADING—On her last album, "What's Inside," Saint Joan did away with most of the simple reggae of her seventies alternative-radio classics, caught a disturbing case of the falsettos, and took up with the Kronos Quartet. But fans shouldn't be put off by such slickness. When she sings her achingly open-hearted love songs, she's as dedicated as she ever was to soulful pining in the lower register. (Central Park SummerStage. June 29 at 3.)

BROOKLYN FUNK ESSENTIALS—Of the many things that tend to come to mind on the L train to Canarsie, it's safe to say that funk isn't one of them. Which is why "Take the L Train (to Brooklyn)," from "Cool and Steady and Easy," the début effort by this nine-piece-plus aggregate is such a wonderful surprise. The house band of your dreams, they explode the dictionary of funk with fearsome authority. And their multilayered attack, led by a three-man horn section and powered by a loping jazz-inflected muscle, makes them even better live. With Nedra Johnson and Ladeez in the House. (Prospect Park Bandshell, Brooklyn. June 29 at 7.)

TROPIJAZZ JAM—Featuring Tito Puente, Eddie Palmieri, Dave Valentin, Hilton Ruiz, David Sanchez, Humberto Ramirez, Charlie Sepulveda, Juan Pablo Torres, Johnny Almendra, John Benitez, Horacio (El Negro) Hernandez, Richie Flores, and Jillian and Marc Anthony. (Carnegie Hall. June 29 at 8.)

EARL KLUGH, KEVIN EUBANKS, AND LARRY CARLTON—Smooth, smoother, smoothest. Don't expect these überguitarists to stir up any trouble—they play exactly the way their fans like it. (Avery Fisher Hall. June 29 at 8.)

BENNY WATERS / DOC CHEATHAM AND FRIENDS—Saxophonist Waters and trumpeter Cheatham are national treasures. Longevity aside (both are in their nineties), these two jazz fortresses have earned plenty of praise for their steadfast gifts of heart and conviction. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 69th St. 772-4448. June 29 at 8.)

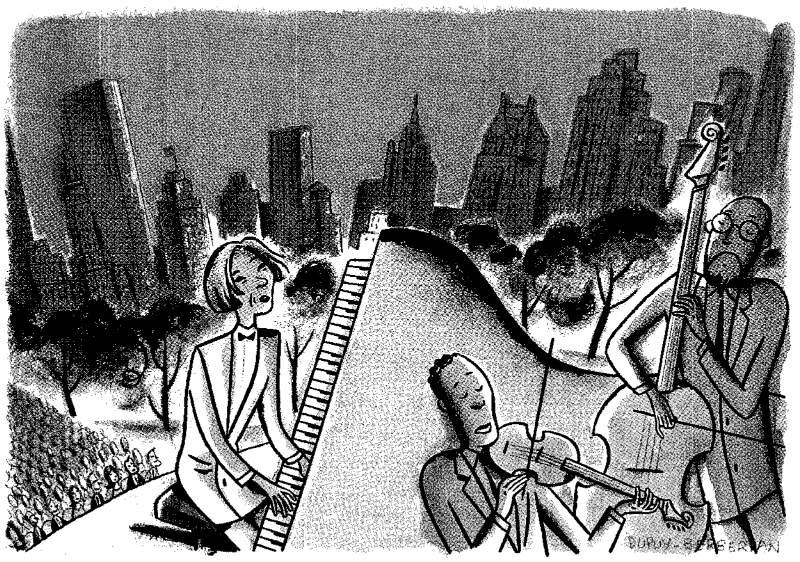
LOUNGE LIZARDS / MEDESKI, MARTIN, AND WOOD—You've got to give John Lurie credit: he's kept his vision, and a working group, intact for more than fifteen years. The Lounge Lizards may still be anarchists at heart, but their joke-band days are long over. The organ, bass, and drum team of Medeski, Martin, and Wood is turning a whole new generation on to the pleasures of warped jazz-funk. (Town Hall. June 29 at 8.)

MASTER MUSICIANS OF JAJOUKA—During a pilgrimage to Morocco in the late sixties, Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones happened upon the mountain village of Jajouka and was transfixed by the shrieking pipes and mesmerizing rhythms of the town's musicians. In 1971, as a posthumous tribute to the guitarist, Rolling Stones Records released "Brian Jones Presents the Pipes of Pan at Jajouka." (It was finally reissued—and rediscovered—last year on CD.) More than a quarter of a century later, the musicians have lost none of their power, and their hypnotic ceremonial music can relax an audience faster than a thousand masseuses. With the Klezmatics. (Central Park SummerStage. June 30 at 4.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

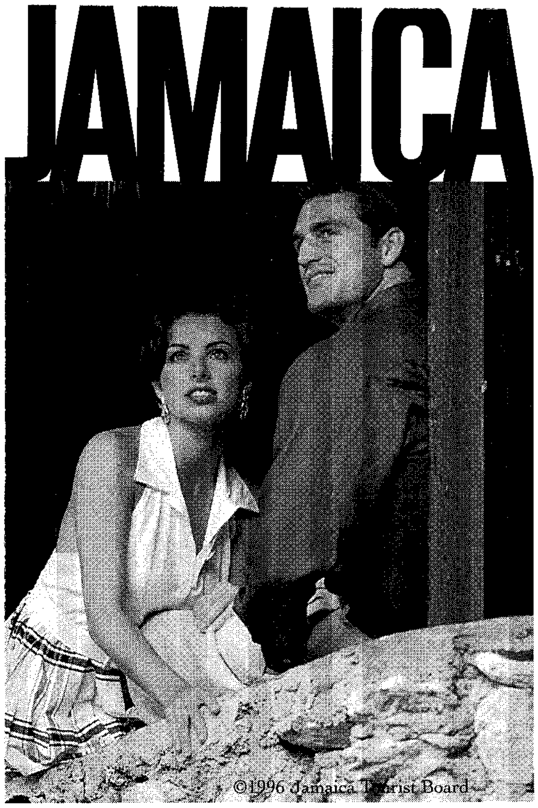
(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

ALGONQUIN HOTEL, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Vocalist **SUSANNAH MC CORKLE,** here through



Ryuichi Sakamoto, in a free concert at Central Park SummerStage.

DUPUY-BERBERIAN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June 29, should feel at home in this upscale nest: both she and the hotel know how to be sophisticated without making a big deal about it. Literate and knowledgeable about the history of her art, she takes her audience on a jazz-inflected stroll through the past seventy years of American popular song, stopping this time to breathe in the rarefied atmosphere of Cole Porter. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through June 23: the **Elvin Jones Jazz Machine** and the **Cedar Walton** sextet. Jones is, was, and always will be the consummate modern drummer. In the sixties, he conversed with his employer John Coltrane in complex polyrhythms and went on to revolutionize the instrument. Thirty years later, he hasn't stopped. Over the years, a slew of excellent players have come out of his band (Ravi Coltrane, the master's son, and Nicholas Payton are two recent Machinists), but let's face it: he's still the main attraction. Pianist Walton has a touch of the old Clark Kent/Superman dichotomy—beneath his mild-mannered exterior lies a player of steely power and intelligence. He's a terrific composer and a gifted bandleader. **Lionel Hampton and the Golden Men of Jazz** take over on June 25. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—After twenty-nine years at the Café Carlyle, **Bobby Short** (through June 29) is polished to such a high gloss that he's almost blinding to behold. Everything he does is breathlessly paced: tempos accelerate, notes ascend, hands clap, teeth flash. His speech has the arcane ring that comes from travelling in glamorous circles: "You're a knockout!" "What an audience!" "How chic!" "Wow!" Just as your attention begins to flag, he shifts gears and does ten minutes of blues with cheeky conviction. But all his mannerisms really come into focus the minute he sings Cole Porter, which turns everything else into a warmup. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through June 23: the **Joe Henderson** trio. As more and more of Stan Getz started creeping into Henderson's understated style, it was probably inevitable that he, too, would turn to Brazilian music and the extraordinary songs of Antonio Carlos Jobim. And not since Getz has any saxophonist so effortlessly melded melody and sinuous rhythm. June 25-30: The **Milt Jackson** quartet. The agility, vigor, and soul of vibraphonist Jackson are just as much on display with his own band as they are with the Modern Jazz Quartet. He's one of our most important and satisfying improvisers. **Les Paul** entertains on Mondays. Dining.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—June 19-22: Pianist **Dick Katz** has the poise and melodic sense of an earlier era. With bassist Todd Coolman. June 26-29: Actor-pianist **Michael Moriarty** plays with the great bassist **Cecil Mc Bee.**

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—The What Is Jazz? festival is presenting gigs all over town, but the lion's share of the action is still centered on the club's main stage. What follows is a few highlights. June 19: **Holly Cole** sings and saxophonist **David S. Ware** howls. June 20: The Art Ensemble of Chicago's **Roscoe Mitchell** and his exacting **Note Factory.** June 21: The late Don Cherry, trumpeter and raging eclectic, is the subject of several tributes; bassist **Charlie Haden** also appears. June 22: Musical rebel **Henry Threadgill.** June 23: Mr. Avant-Garde, **Anthony Braxton,** with a sextet; clarinettist **Don Byron** with *his* sextet. June 25: Euro-piano giant **Misha Mengelberg;** the clarinet-heavy **Clusone Trio.** June 26: Uptown stars **Jack DeJohnette** and **Joanne Brackeen;** high-profile guitarist **Marc Ribot.** June 27: Big-name guitarslinger **John Scofield** slums downtown. June 28: Saxophonist **Kenny Garrett** with guitar hero **Pat Metheney.** June 29: Quirky piano legends **Horace Tapscott** and **Andrew Hill;** contemporary upstart **Steve Coleman;** rediscovered sixties upstart **Sonny Simmons.** June 30: A supertrio of reedman **Marty Ehrlich,** bassist **Mark Dresser,** and avant-garde drum avatar **Andrew Cyrille;** groove guitarist **Charlie Hunter;** drummer **Joey Baron;** stalwart trumpeter **Dave Douglas.** July 1: **David Murray** plays with a variety of big bands.

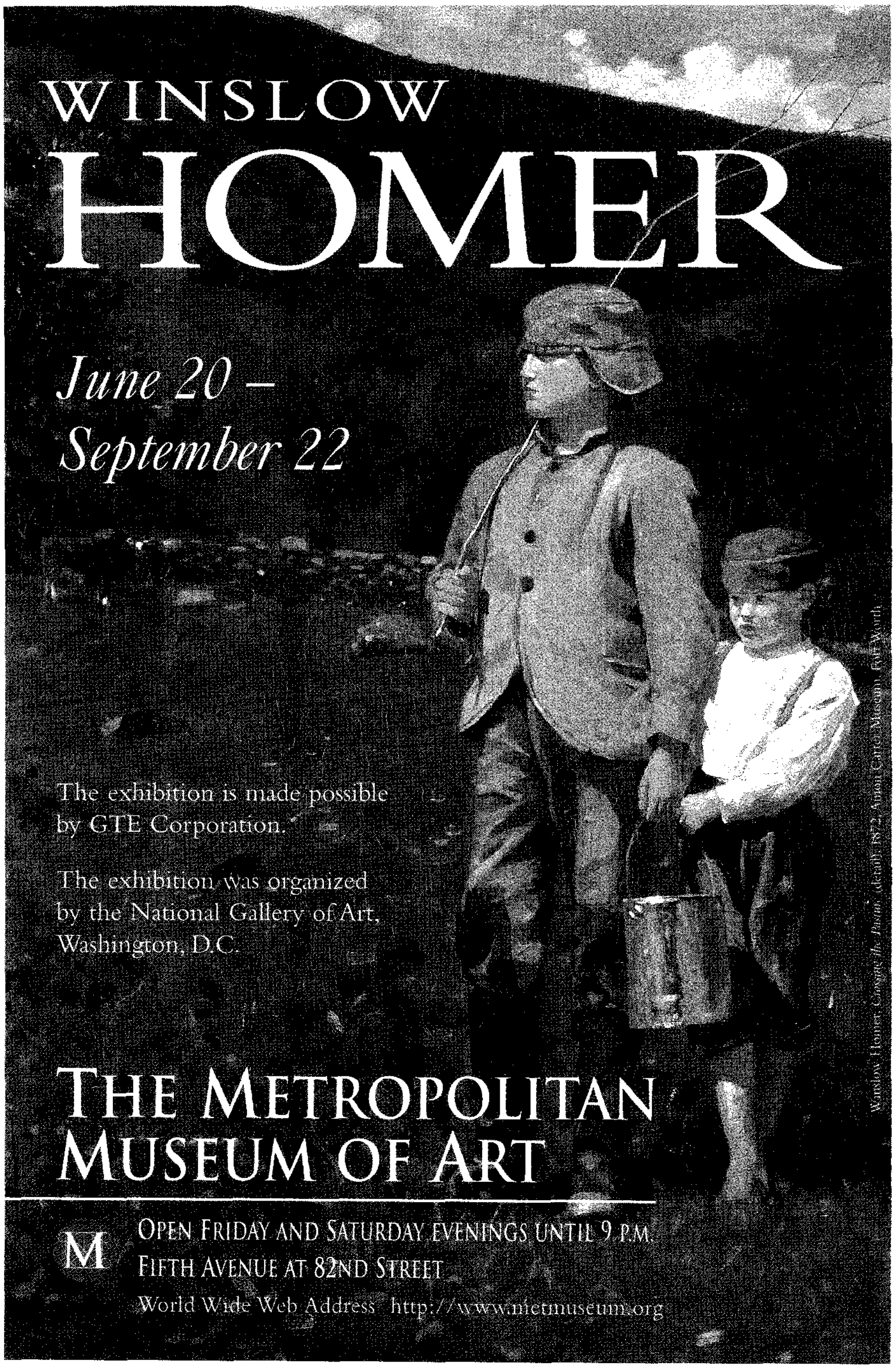
Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The preëminent interpreter of the great American songbook, **Mary Cleere Haran** (in through June 22) is an artist of almost supernatural poise. For this engagement she turns her unblinking eye to the brief but inspired musical partnership of Jerome Kern and Dorothy Fields. Unlike many club singers, Haran knows the value of understatement; she uses her smile not to wow the room but to light up her songs. She also loves to talk, and some of her monologues turn into pocket essays (she may be the only singer who can work Proust and Mel Brooks into the same sentence). Closed Mondays.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through June 23: pianist **Hilton Ruiz** is equally at home with both Latin and jazz music. The unsung hero of innumerable groups from the past two decades, he deserves serious appreciation for his own dexterous work. June 25-30: The **Danilo Perez** trio. With the highly praised "Panamonk"—a bold reworking of Thelonious Monk tunes—this Panamanian pianist has finally arrived. Latin accents pepper his formidable chops, and he imbues everything he plays with personality. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—After a self-conscious, history-enslaved early period, pianist **Marcus Roberts** (through June 23) has finally begun to hit his stride. On his new recording, "Time and Circumstance," stylistic mannerisms have been banished in favor of fresh ideas. June 25-30: The **Benny Bailey** quartet. An expatriate since the sixties, Bailey possesses a burnished trumpet tone and the wisdom of an old-school New York hard-bopper. Welcome home, Benny. He's joined by saxophonist Jimmy Heath, who should be able to match his élan and skill. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays (and takes over the Brooklyn Academy of Music on June 20, at noon).

ROCK, ETC.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—June 19: **Rosanne Cash.** Listening to her stark new album, "Ten Song Demo,"



WINSLOW HOMER

June 20 – September 22

The exhibition is made possible by GTE Corporation.

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Winslow Homer, *Crossing the Pasture* (detail), 1872, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth

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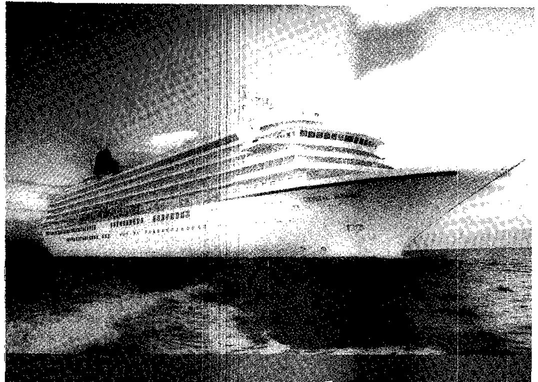

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it's becoming easier to understand why Johnny Cash's smoky-voiced daughter traded in the illusions of country-music superstardom for the allusions of the singer-songwriter's trade. As if to confirm the literacy of her work, Cash has just published "Bodies of Water," a collection of arresting short stories. June 30: JOHNNY WINTER. Dining.

BROWNIES, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—June 19: LIDA HUSIK, a thoughtful rocker with a sultry alto and a coquettish falsetto who's steeped in the Stones and the Velvet Underground. June 20: CAKELIKE, a noisy girlie combo with MTV in the family tree. (The lead singer was in the cast of "The State.")

CHICAGO B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—June 28-29: Eightysomething guitar legend ROBERT JR. LOCKWOOD.

FEZ, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—June 21-22: Groovy instrumental rock with LARS VEGAS and LAZY BOY. The MINGUS BIG BAND still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—June 21-22: PATTI SMITH. It's not sufficient to say that "Gone Again," the first new collection in nearly ten years from this pioneering poet of punk, is spectacular: it's a bona-fide *event,* bursting with pain, humor, danger, warmth, spirituality, sensuality, and reaffirmation of rock and roll's ability to liberate. It's also far closer in spirit to her groundbreaking 1975 début, "Horses," than to her previous comeback, the 1988 "Dream of Life." That she could channel all her recent losses—the deaths of friends (Robert Mapplethorpe), colleagues (pianist Richard Sohl), and, within a month of each other in late 1994, her younger brother, Todd, and her husband, former MC5 guitarist Fred Smith—into such a positive work is remarkable and inspiring. She'll be supported by a band that includes her old aide-de-camp, Lenny Kaye, and Television's Tom Verlaine on guitars, and (at least at her West Coast shows in March) her thirteen-year-old son, Jackson. June 25: The CHEMICAL BROTHERS. June 27: Retro rock with the SPIN DOCTORS. July 2: The BUZZCOCKS. These original U.K. punks broke up in 1980 and re-formed in 1993, just in time to see Green Day cashing in on their demolition-derby sound, but their terrific new album, "All Set," finds Pete Shelley and company still merrily thumbing their noses at the amateurs.

MAXWELL'S, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (1-201 798-4064)—June 20: KUSTOMIZED. June 22: Former Wall of Voodoo weirdo STAN RIDGWAY. June 29: LOTION.

MERCURY LOUNGE, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—June 19: JAMES MC MURTRY. This Texas barstool historian (and son of the novelist Larry McMurtry) writes taut narratives about El Caminos and small towns swallowed up by big cities. His terrific third record, "Where'd You Hide the Body?," was full of intricate acoustic guitar, pedal steel, and plainspoken conviction. With Rockabilly auteur TAV FALCO, who favors a John Waters mustache, a gravity-defying pompadour, and obscure tunes from the vaults of Sun and Stax. June 20: WEBB WILDER. June 24: MAYFIELD, featuring Curt Smith, formerly of Tears for Fears. June 26: STAN RIDGWAY swings over from Maxwell's. June 27: SPLENDORA, an elegantly ragged all-female quintet that recently released a delightful début album called "In the Grass."

SUPPER CLUB, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—June 19: An evening with PHOEBE SNOW.

TRAMPS, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—June 20: The JOE ELY band. Like fellow Texan Jimmie Dale Gilmore, this gritty singer-songwriter was a member of the infamous seventies group the Flatlanders, and he's still a square peg caught in country-rock's round hole. June 27: Alternative-rock heavies VELOCITY GIRL and THE POSIES. June 28: New Orleans soul diva IRMA THOMAS has been knocking out club audiences since the late fifties. Anyone in doubt of her bluesy authority need only refer to the singer's 1991 album, "Simply the Best: Live!," on which she covers Allen Toussaint and Otis Redding with a fiery panache that's all her own.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Winslow Homer," a comprehensive survey of the painter's career, comprising nearly two hundred paintings, watercolors, and drawings. Through Sept. 22. . . . ¶ "Ancient Art from the Shumei Family Collection," antiquities from Egypt, China, Central Asia, and Iran. Through Sept. 1. . . . ¶ After a painstaking ten-year conservation-and-restoration effort, the Gubbio Studiolo—a masterful trompe-l'oeil Renaissance chamber, with intricately inlaid wood panels that give the illusion of open cupboards containing books, scientific instruments, and other objects—has been reinstalled. . . . ¶ "Genoa: Drawings and Prints 1530-1800." Through July 7. . . . ¶ "Picturing Paradise: Colonial Photography of Samoa, 1875-1925." Through Aug. 4. . . . ¶ "Art of the Deccani Sultans." Through Aug. 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 W. 53rd St.—"From Bauhaus to Pop." No one besides Alfred Barr has done more to make MOMA the world's premier modern-art collection than Philip Johnson: a member of its first advisory committee (starting in 1930), the first director of its Department of Architecture and Design, and the designer of the Sculpture Garden (1953) and the East Wing (1964), he has also given the collection some of its most important holdings, especially in Abstract Expressionism, Pop, and minimalism. In honor of his ninetieth birthday, the museum has put together a selection of his gifts. Many are familiar and all are topnotch, but there is a feeling of one-eachness about the exhibit: the single Abstract Expressionist gallery, for example, squeezes in Newman, Rothko, Gottlieb, Stout, Tomlin, a ravishing Guston, a wee Kline, and a Chamberlain. Through Sept. 3. . . . ¶ "Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and Transformation" includes a hundred and thirty paintings, and nearly as many works on paper, depicting lovers, wives, poets, art dealers, and children. Through Sept. 17. . . . ¶ "Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980-95." Through Sept. 10. (For the run of the Picasso show, the museum's hours are Saturdays through Mondays, 9:30 to 6; Tuesdays, 11 to 6; and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30. Timed-entry tickets to Picasso are available in the lobby and through Ticketmaster, at 307-4545.)

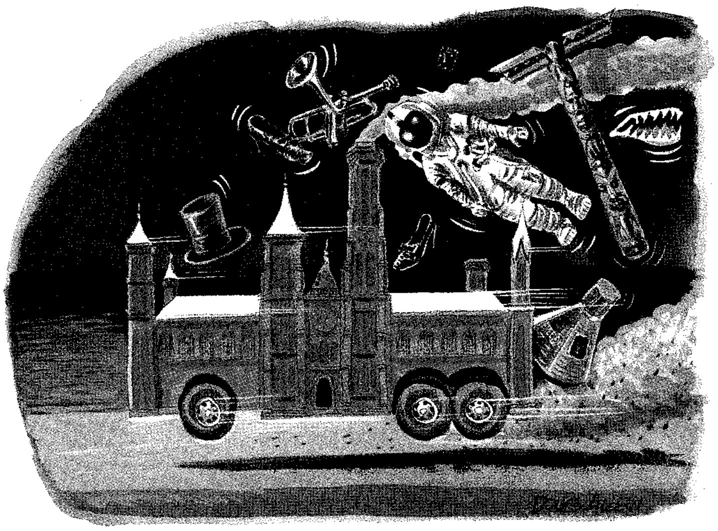
GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Africa: The Art of a Continent" includes more than five hundred sculptures, murals, ceremonial objects, pieces of jewelry, and textiles, culled from collections around the world. Through Sept. 29. . . . ¶ "In/Sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present." Through Sept. 22. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—"Paul Cadmus: The Sailor Trilogy," a display of the ninety-one-year-old painter's notorious satirical suite: "Shore Leave" (1933), "The Fleet's In!" (1934), and "Sailors and Floosies" (1938). Through Sept. 1. (A show of the artist's recent drawings is at DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St., through July 26.) . . . ¶ "An American Story," a chronological survey of twentieth-century paintings and sculptures, both well-known and obscure, from the museum's collection. . . . ¶ A stylized, gardenlike installation of video sculptures, by Shigeko Kubota. Through Aug. 25. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM, Eastern Parkway—"Converging Cultures: Art & Identity in Spanish America." An intelligently curated, wonderfully intriguing exhibition of Latin American art from the sixteenth century through the early twentieth, focussing on the interpenetrations of native and colonial cultures. Through July 14. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

ASIA SOCIETY, Park Ave. at 70th St.—"Worlds Within Worlds." As long ago as the Sung dynasty (960-1279), Chinese artists and scholars collected fantastically shaped rocks both for their formal beauty and as aids to inspiration; seventy choice specimens are on display. Through Aug. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; Sundays, noon to 5.)

China Institute, 125 E. 65th St.—"Hare's Fur, Tortoiseshell, and Partridge Feathers," a stunning exhibition consisting of eighty glimpses of perfection by Chinese ceramists from the fifth century to the fifteenth. The fanciful title derives from the names Chinese scholars gave some of the more exquisite techniques: "hare's fur" is mimicked by ineffably delicate streaks of rust across a luminous black ground; "tortoiseshell" describes a chocolate-brown glaze suffused with amber and buff. Some amazing southern Sung dynasty stoneware tea bowls are decorated with dainty silhouettes, such as a blossoming plum in midnight blue, which explodes and melts like a nebula. Through July 6. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 5, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)



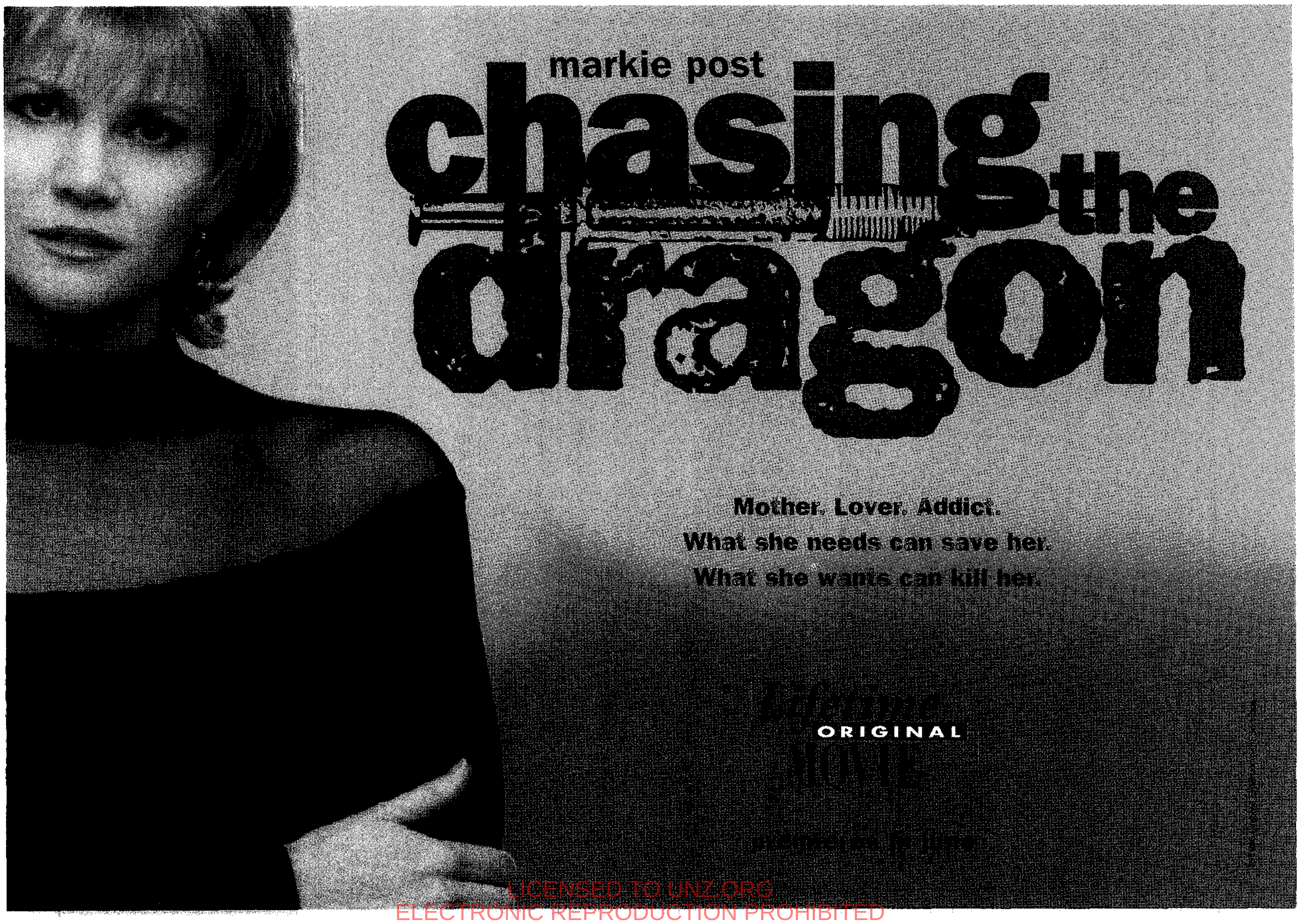
"America's Smithsonian," at the Coliseum (see Other Venues).

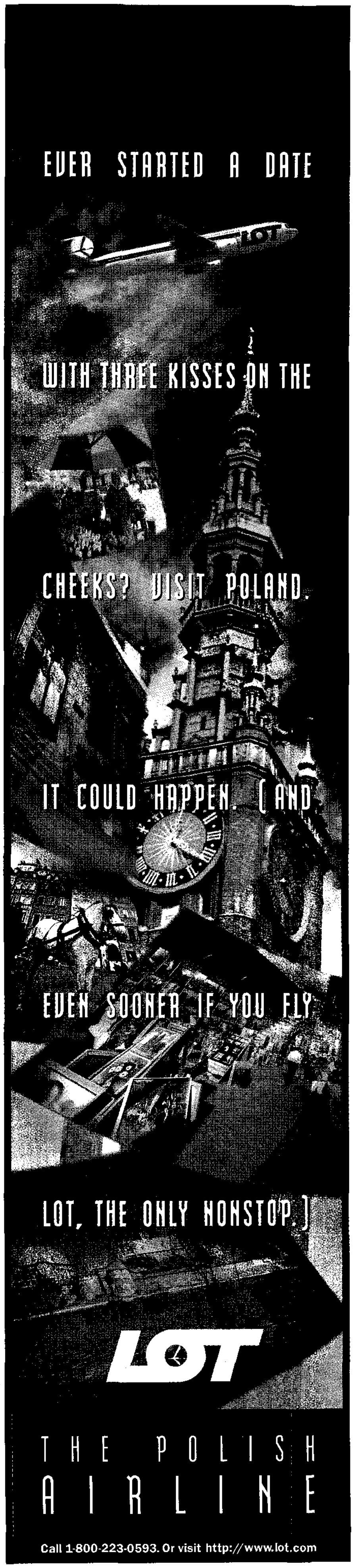
DOUG ALLEN

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St.—The house of the English architect Sir John Soane (1753-1837) is certainly London's most eccentric museum, and possibly its most charming; now a fascinating sliver of it is on loan here. "Soane: Connoisseur & Collector" comprises some of the finest drawings and architectural models from the collection, including works by Piranesi, Wren, Reynolds, and five glorious watercolors from its nine thousand sheets by the Adam brothers. A watercolor of Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone, by Joseph Michael Gandy (Soane's first draftsman), is a lavishly dramatic cutaway with two little figures in the foreground unscrolling the floor plan, and an elevation of the façade miraculously floating in a rainbowed sky. Through July 7. (Open daily, except Mondays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St.—"Being William Morris: A Centenary Exhibition," which is taken largely from the Morgan's own superb collection, presents every aspect of the Victorian artist-philosopher's career: drawings for book illustrations and stained glass, vibrant wallpaper and fabric designs, socialist manifestos, and, of course, exquisitely printed books from his Kelmscott Press, many of them in ornate, elegant bindings. Through Sept. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Queens Museum at the Bulova Corporate Center, 75-20 Astoria Blvd., Jackson Heights—"Richard Rothman: Studies fom Nature." Selections from an ongoing series of photographs about the marginalization of nature, made during frequent swings through the outer boroughs and New Jersey. "Sound Wall, Queens" (1995) is one of several quick, sharp essays: a broken, denuded sycamore rises from the curb in front of a gridded cement sound wall, which protects a similarly rectilinear (and windowless) office building. Power lines float above the tree, completing the circuit of collusion against nature; a wavy line carved into the wall in an attempt to echo the natural world ends up mocking it. "Front Yard with Ailanthus, Brooklyn" shows a stubby, unbranched sapling (of the now disappearing species celebrated in "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn") and an old stump sharing a vest-pocket patch of dirt. Rothman's brand of black-and-white visual description isn't just straight documentary and it's not overly poetic: it's got a prosaic lilt, with alternating passages of bleak naturalism and wary optimism. More complex tableaux, like "Tall Tree and American Flags, Astoria," "Housing Projects with White Shutters," and "Graves, Queens," richly repay the extended reading required. Through Aug. 10. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 7 to 7; Saturdays, 11 to 4. For more information and for directions, call 1-718 899-0700.)





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GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Ross Bleckner—Mary Boone inaugurates her elegant new Fifth Avenue space (necessarily a bit more cramped than its SoHo predecessor) with a happy, retina-improving exhibition by New York's favorite salon artist. In his first solo show since his Guggenheim retrospective last year, Bleckner moves away from the AIDS epidemic to light up the canvas with buoyant, deeply spacious floral displays. In one of two works here titled "Dream and Do," a breathless bouquet of evanescent, candy-colored pompons looks more like fireworks exploding in the soul than anything that might grow in a garden. Other, darker paintings draw on a more restrained palette, but they all still stream with light. Through June 29. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

Mercedes Matter / Kit White—Modernism the old-fashioned, obsessive way: elegantly composed, exquisitely painted still-lifes, at some moments suggesting Cézanne's pencil-and-watercolor drawings, at others, Hans Hofmann's transitional works. The artist is a master paint handler, but the more she works them, the less they work. . . . ¶ The New York Studio School *(8 W. 8th St.), which Matter founded, has a* show of her drawings from the past ten years, through July 13. / Delicately colored, boldly designed abstractions in a Twombly vein. "Field of Saints" features some ominous spurting organs that describe, rather than explore, primal forces. Both shows through June 29. (Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. Open Mondays.)

Daniel Spoerri—Highly suggestive collages that combine teeth, glass eyes, and bits of soup bones with costume jewelry, glitter, lace, coins, and nineteenth-century anatomical engravings—the work of a perfectly preserved between-the-wars avant-garde sensibility, executed with great élan. Through June 21. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

Andy Warhol—A neat little conspectus of the artist's career from the early fifties until 1975, when he started to run out of smart ideas. The early camp is particularly fetching: drawings of ladies' shoes and boys in blue jeans, and a hilarious screen for a window at Bonwit's, with a recipe for molded strawberry Jell-O scrawled across it in his mother's hand. Not to mention Campbell's soup cans, Marilyns, dollar bills, an electric chair, and a very chic Mao. Through June 29. (Sheehan, 20 W. 57th St.)

"California Funk"—In the late sixties and early seventies, Northern California ceramists (and critics) deployed the sobriquet "funk" for the first time in a fine-art context, scorning noble pots and creating some of the funniest, most original work of the day. They loved making their mediums look like anything but what they were: Robert Arneson's whimsical clay teapot is "pewter," while Richard Shaw's porcelain jar looks exactly like a big, ugly rock. Through June 29. (Parrasch, 20 W. 57th St.)

Short List—**paul cadmus,** DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through July 26. . . . **sandro chia** and **malcolm morley,** Janis, 110 W. 57th St. Both shows through June 22. . . . **jacqueline donachie,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. Open Mondays; through July 12. . . . **robert goodnough,** De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St. Through June 28. . . . **per kirkeby,** Werner, 21 E. 67th St. Open Mondays; through June 28. . . . **george maciunas,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. Through June 22. . . . **anne truitt,** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. Through June 21.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

David Deutsch—"Surveillance," a series of landscapes and buildings painted as if seen from an airplane window. (The artist uses photographs he takes from airplanes in descent as the basis for images he then embroiders with his own invention.) The title suggests a self-consciously critical art along the lines of Julia Scher or Sam Samore; in fact, Deutsch purveys an orchidaceously rich romanticism in a palette that veers from washed-out or smoky grays to colors of an almost lurid intensity—viridian, magenta, bruised violet. The implied tension between fact and fiction, appearance and reality, is rather thin at this point, but Deutsch's lush painterly technique makes his pictures anything but banal. Through June 22. (Gorney, 100 Greene St.)

Julio Galán—New paintings, some incorporating collage elements, by the well-known Mexican eccentric; though they are primarily fantasy images of Latin American women, the erotic currents that coursed through much of his earlier work now seem hushed. But a cuckoo south-of-the-border surrealism remains his guiding imperative. Through June 30. (Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Yayoi Kusama—A survey of paintings, collages, and soft sculptures from the fifties and sixties *by a pioneering Japanese minimalist.* Elegant formalism (a famous square canvas covered with airmail stickers) abuts earthy sensuality (a chair upholstered in white canvas fingers that undulate like the tentacles of a sea anemone). A series of paintings of "infinity nets"—thousands of tiny overlapping circles—demonstrates the artist's interest in such painterly questions as color and composition without compromising her cool credentials. Through June 21. (Cooper, 155 Wooster St.)

ONLY CONNECT

Web Sightings

Enterzone (http://ezone.org:1080/enterzone.html)—The most intriguing Web sites often resemble nineteen-thirties border radio, those pirate broadcasts (by hucksters, preachers, d.j. poets) that came over the airwaves from across the Mexican frontier. Enterzone has that feel—off the wall, unreliable, just north of illicit. Unlike other literary Web zines, this year-and-a-half-old quarterly couldn't be experienced the same way in print. It employs the cut-up techniques of William Burroughs (and under "Other eZines We Like," it links to a Web page devoted to Old Bull Lee) to stack the deck of its contents in unexpected ways.

Though it's based in Berkeley, there's no there here: contributors, many of them pseudonymous, come from Manhattan, Chicago, New Orleans. Not everything works; by and large, the art and poetry are better than the fiction and journalism, which can be reminiscent of a college literary magazine. The feel of *Enterzone is young—the self-dramatizing aes*thetic of a generation that identifies with lab rats and torture. That certainly applies to Episode 5 (each issue is archived under a "Meta-Index"), whose centerpiece, a multimedia work by Mark Napier and Levi Asher titled "Chicken Wire Mother," was inspired by the famous 1966 experiment in which baby rhesus monkeys were separated from their real mothers and given wire and cloth substitutes, only to grow up into indifferent or hostile parents themselves. You begin on a gallerylike page. Clicking on "The Effects" takes you to a crude collage ("Find the Chicken Wire Mother in YOUR neighborhood!") of a TV dinner, a cartoon house, and a cartoon headless chicken, each of which leads to a little essay, while "A Dark Exploration" opens up a prose poem that builds to a more harrowing (and moving) evocation: the two-year-old boy who was murdered by two ten-year-olds in Liverpool in 1993. Though the piece concludes on a jokey note ("No monkeys, chickens or humans were harmed in the making of this Web site"), the leaps of thought are surprisingly effective, reminding us that the voices out on the wire are real.

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FOUNDED IN 1913

Charles Long—Works on paper and two large wall drawings by a sculptor given to ectoplasmic sci-fi-style forms. Long's drawings are very similar to his sculptures (none of which are in this show)—some of them might even be thought of as preparatory studies—though on the whole the drawings pale in comparison. The wall drawings, however, give some sense of the artist's loopy vision: "No More Whatever" and "Totally Exciting," they announce, trumpeting his brave new world. Through June 29. (Bonakdar, 130 Prince St.)

Short List—**DALE CHIHULY,** Cowles, 420 West Broadway. *Through July 26.* . . . **SPELMAN EVANS DOWNER,** Arstark, 568 Broadway. Through June 28. . . . **TONY FITZPATRICK,** Knowlton, 568 Broadway. Through June 29. . . . **PAMELA FRASER,** Kaplan, 580 Broadway. Through June 29. . . . **CHARLES GAINES,** Weber, 142 Greene St. Through June 22. . . . **DONALD JUDD,** Inglett, 100 Wooster St. Through June 29. . . . **HABIB KHERADYAR,** Room, 25 Thompson St. Through June 29. . . . **JACKIE MC ALLISTER,** Nordanstad, 289 Hudson St. Opens at 1; through July 6. . . . **ROBERT RYMAN,** Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. Through June 21.

OTHER VENUES

"America's Smithsonian"—While there's no place like home, we can forgive the Smithsonian for dissenting—it's been stuck on the Mall for a hundred and fifty years. A two-year barnstorming tour of three hundred objects from the Institution's collection has arrived in Manhattan. Among the travellers: one of several pairs of Dorothy's ruby slippers (these worn by Judy Garland when she danced); the Apollo 14 command module; the Wright Brothers' biplane Vin Fiz; the top hat President Lincoln wore to Ford's Theater that night; and the Canyon Diablo meteorite, about four and a half billion years old. Through July 24. (Coliseum, Columbus Circle. Open Sundays through Thursdays, 9 to 8, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9. Free timed-entry passes are available at the Coliseum each morning at 9; advance tickets can be reserved, for a small handling charge, at 1-800 913-8687.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Diana Michener / Emmet Gowin—There is nothing voyeuristic about these brilliant pictures of cadavers, taken in 1993 and 1994. Without being didactic or distanced or frightening or reductive, the photographs tell us the facts. But they also communicate something much more difficult to capture: spirit. Whether the subject is an old person or a young one (or merely the innards of a corpse), the photographer's conscientiousness, her passion, and her compassion come across, and the fine quality of the prints speaks for itself. / Austere aerial photographs of Kansas farmlands in winter and of the Yucca Flat nuclear-test site, in Nevada. On the farms, high-contrast circles (from irrigation pivots) and squares (plowing routes, access roads) subsume abstract patterns of snow on black soil, with flourishes of human and animal tracks. The abstraction rises to another level in one suite of four lightly toned prints in which each snow-streaked swale resembles a modern-art canvas: impastoed Expressionism, stained watercolor, drip painting, scratchy Cy Twombly. The Nevada photographs—lunar expanses of desert pockmarked with perfectly round "subsidence" craters, left by underground blasts—are blunter but no less effective. In all, spellbinding pictures. Both exhibitions through June 29. (Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St.)

DoDo Jin Ming / Walker Evans (1903-75)—Black-and-white photographs and multi-picture grids of sights in Egypt: a few people, many pyramids, sun-baked leather shoes, waters near the Aswân High Dam. Repetition and variation are the artist's primary tools (she is also a concert violinist), most apparent in the Aswân and pyramid grids, in each of which twelve similar, unremarkable views together convey the sense that memory is a sieve. A competently composed fugue. / Repetition of a different order describes the arc of Evans's career. Building façades were a cornerstone of his understated, even laconic œuvre, and this well-selected group of somewhat lesser-known domestic exteriors offers a welcome review. In one sequence, abandoned and decaying antebellum plantation houses in Vicksburg, Mississippi, are hung near that town's ramshackle Negro Quarter houses. Another ghost, the Hermitage plantation in Savannah, Georgia, starkly eulogizes the Old South. Northeastern gingerbread houses are treated lovingly, and three 1972 views of a tiny box of a house in Tasley, Virginia, form a testament to Evans as documentarian not just of existence but of essence. Both shows through June 29. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St.)

A detail from "Untitled (Boy with Steam)," by Joe Mills, in "Delirium," at Ricco/Maresca.

"Paul Himmel and the Brodovitch Circle"—Himmel worked for *Harper's Bazaar, Vogue, Fortune,* and several other magazines from the forties through the sixties; his photographs exemplified the kind of movement demanded by Alexey Brodovitch, the renowned art director of *Bazaar.* This show, of noncommercial work, is a fantasia of blurred motion—the ballet, the circus, and other performances, all captured with consummate ease. In one picture from 1952, a ballerina glides on point in "Swan Lake"; in another, the dancer Yuriko's arm and silk sleeve are transformed into a billowing orchid. Some anomalous high-key color portraits and nudes, some solarized, which prefigure Pop coloring and attitude, form a happy counterpoint. A small selection of work by other photographers, such as Frank, Penn, Model, and Avedon, is in the back room. Through June 22. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St.)

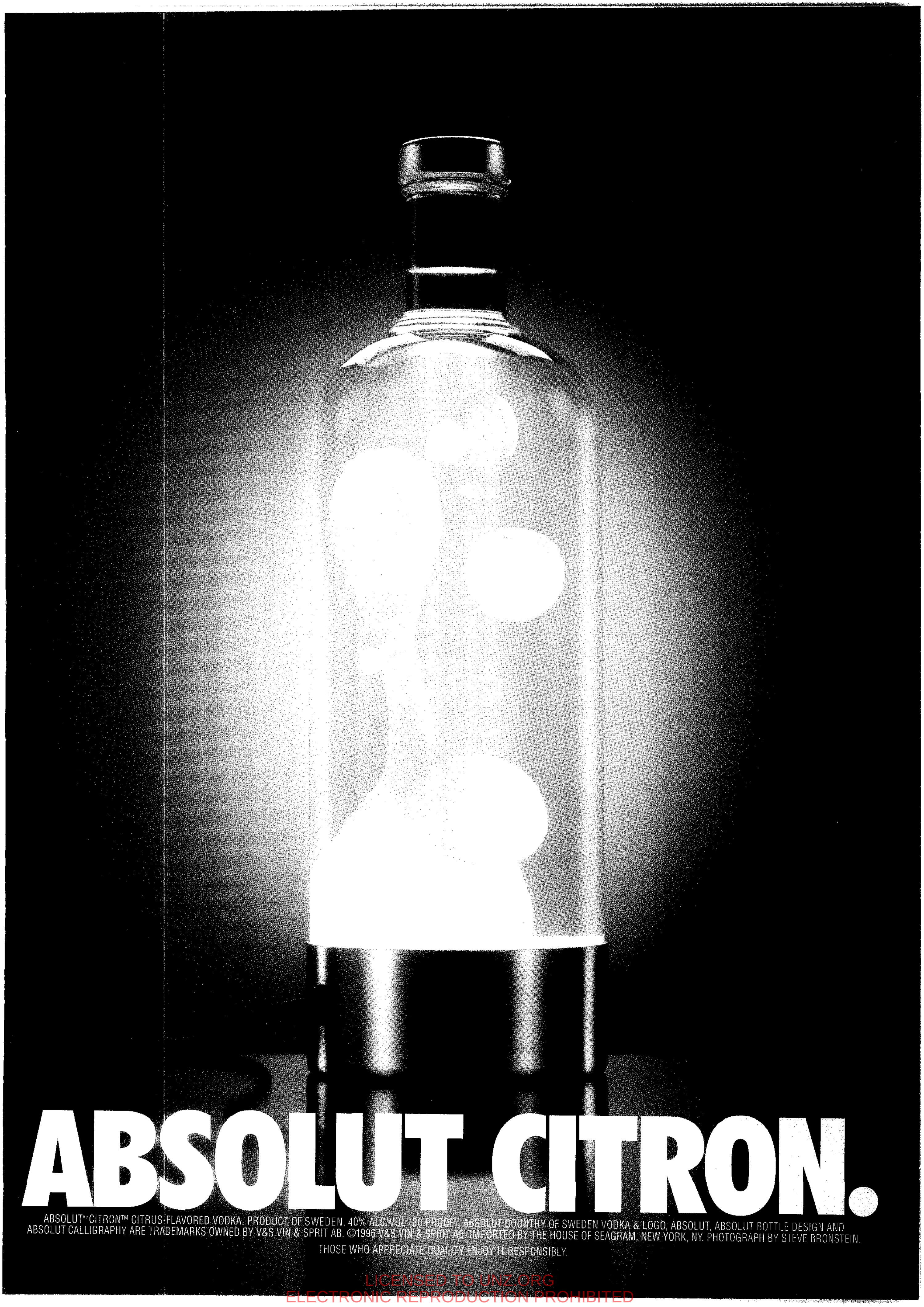
"Delirium"—Summer group shows generally shoot for a light spirit and an easily grasped theme (or none at all); this selection of portraits and a few abstract images, from 1854 to the present, has a darker cast, and it hangs together beautifully. "Delirium" has been defined broadly by curator W. M. Hunt as anything from ecstasy to despair to the swooning, sickening feeling you get just looking at certain pictures. Hence W. Eugene Smith's famous "Mad Eyes, Haiti" (1959), of a demented-looking head emerging from (or receding into) total blackness, makes sense in proximity to Felix Meheux's 1905 image of grisly surgical incisions on the face of a cadaver. A grimacing Janis Joplin, head aslant and hair astray, is transformed into a pained goddess by Art Kane, while on the same wall Nancy Burson offers her blurred closeup of a woman with the largest bulging eyes you ever saw. Other notable pictures are reportorial (Jill Waterman, George Krause, Weegee), sexual (Saul Leiter, David Lachapelle, Robert Mapplethorpe), and experimental (Joe Mills, Gerald Slota, Eric Rondepierre). Through Aug. 17. (Ricco/Maresca, 152 Wooster St. . . . **NOTE:** A "Delirium" Web site is up, for the run of the show, at http://artnetweb.com/rmgallery.)

"Baby Pictures"—Lots of bemused infants and toddlers, in an amiable if not terrifically inspired show. Their poses range from naked atop a beach ball (Suzanne Camp Crosby) to cradled in the "arms" of a weimaraner (William Wegman). Among the standouts are works by Harry Callahan (one of his famous pictures of his wife and daughter), Adam Fuss (a big, orange photogram), David Levinthal (a blurry dollhouse detail), and Neil Winokur (a huge portrait of a boy with the uncanny visage of a forty-year-old). Through June 29. (Bravin Post Lee, 80 Mercer St.)

"The Insistent Image"—A clutch of well-known photographs (with a few anonymous pictures sprinkled in) by such blue-chip artists as Weston, Abbott, Watkins, Kertész, Cartier-Bresson, Steichen, and Lange. A smaller, more kinetic group of photographs from *Life* (John Loengard, Mark Shaw, Elliott Erwitt, Robert Riger, and others) is in the back room. Through July 26. (Danziger, 130 Prince St.)

Short List—**STEVEN BROCK,** Richardson, 560 Broadway. Through Aug. 16. . . . **LYNN BUTLER,** Leica, 670 Broadway. Through July 31. . . . **MIGUEL CALDERÓN,** Rosen, 130 Prince St. Through June 29. . . . **GERARD FIERET,** Mann, 42 E. 76th St. Through June 29. . . . **JAN GROOVER,** Borden, 560 Broadway. Through June 22. . . . **HELMAR LERSKI,** Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. Through June 22. . . . **GEORGE PLATT LYNES,** DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through July 26. . . . **DANNY LYON,** Lowinsky, 578 Broadway. Through June 29. . . . **BOB RICHARDSON,** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. Through July 6. . . . **JOHN PATRICK SALISBURY,** Saul, 560 Broadway. Through July 3. . . . **JOSEF SUDEK,** International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8; through July 7. . . . **DAVID TURNLEY** and **PETER TURNLEY,** International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8; through Sept. 8.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Queens Museum at the Bulova Corporate Center.)



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CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—Presenting free outdoor concert performances, evenings at 8. June 19: "Turandot," with Ruth Falcon, Norah Amsellem, Giuliano Ciannella, and Alexander Anisimov; conducted by Nello Santi. (Juniper Valley Park, Queens.) . . . ¶ June 21: "Aida," with Sharon Sweet, Stefania Toczyska, Kristján Jóhannsson, and Theodore Lambrinos; Christian Badea. (Cunningham Park, Queens.) . . . ¶ June 22: "Turandot," with Ghena Dimitrova, Veronica Villarroel, Lando Bartolini, and Paul Plishka; Mr. Santi. (Waterloo Village, Stanhope, N.J.) . . . ¶ June 25: "Aida," with Ms. Sweet, Ms. Toczyska, Mr. Jóhannsson, and Frederick Burchinal; Mr. Badea. (Brookdale Park, Montclair, N.J.) . . . ¶ June 26: "Turandot," with Ms. Dimitrova, Ms. Villarroel, Mr. Bartolini, and Mr. Plishka; Mr. Santi. (Brookdale Park, Montclair, N.J.) . . . ¶ June 28: "Aida," with Ms. Sweet, Barbara Dever, Mr. Jóhannsson, and Mr. Lambrinos; Mr. Badea. (Buccleuch Park, New Brunswick, N.J.) . . . ¶ June 29: "Turandot," with Ms. Dimitrova, Ms. Villarroel, Mr. Bartolini, and Mr. Plishka; Mr. Santi. (Cooper River Park, Pennsauken, N.J.) (No tickets necessary. . . . **Note:** For rain dates and other information, call 362-6000.)

"The Jewel Box"—The American Opera Musical Theatre Company offers the first New York staging of a pastiche opera in which the librettist, Paul Griffiths, has set his words to little-known music by Mozart. (John Jay College, 899 Tenth Ave., at 59th St. June 19 and June 21-22 at 8 and June 20 at 7. For information about tickets, call 465-9489.)

American Chamber Opera Company—Presenting the première of "Beast and Superbeast," a quartet of chamber operas based on stories by Saki, with music by Jorge Martín and librettos by Andrew Joffe. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. June 20-21 and June 24-25 at 8. For information about tickets, call 781-0857.)

American Opera Projects—Presenting a concert version of "Patience and Sarah," with music by Paula M. Kimper and a libretto by Wende Persons. (463 Broome St. June 25-26 and June 28 at 7:30 and June 29 at 1. For information about tickets, call 431-8102.)

Center for Contemporary Opera—Anne Sexton wrote her "Transformations" as a sort of highly personalized gloss on several of her daughter's favorite fairy tales. The stories of Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, and Rapunzel (among others) are plenty peculiar just as the Brothers Grimm wrote them; transformed by "a middle-aged witch" (as the poet described herself), they take on a surrealistic and satiric sheen. In 1972, the University of Minnesota Chamber Theatre commissioned Conrad Susa to set the work as an opera—his first—and, after spending time with the poet to absorb the timbre and cadence of her speech, he premièred the work in 1973, in Minneapolis. To everyone's relief, Sexton was pleased with the result: at the intermission of the first preview, she stood up and yelled across the auditorium, "Conrad, you're a genius!" Richard Marshall conducts this staged revival. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. June 26-27 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Galatea—The chamber choir, directed by Susanne Peck, performs a-cappella works from the interwar decades, by Hindemith, Ravel, Poulenc, Strauss, and Bartók. (St. Luke's in-the-Fields, 487 Hudson St., at Grove St. June 19 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

Musica Sacra—Richard Westenburg directs the chorus and orchestra in Bach's Cantatas No. 36, No. 124, No. 131, and No. 202 (the wedding cantata "Weichet nur," featuring soprano Mary Ellen Callahan). (Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, Fifth Ave. at 55th St. June 21 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

Damrosch Park Concerts—Free al-fresco listening at Lincoln Center's band shell. June 23 and June 30 at 7: Gene Young conducts the Goldman Band. . . . ¶ June 24 and July 1 at 8: Skitch Henderson leads the New York Pops.

Washington Square Music Festival—This staple of the Village's summer cultural diet continues with a pair of programs that spotlight the woodwind family. June 25 at 8: Wind transcriptions of orchestral compositions, including Rossini's "William Tell" Overture and Brahms's "Variations on a Theme by Haydn," as arranged by Gilbert Dejean. Also on the program are Strauss's Wind Serenade (Op. 7) and a transcription of sections from Ravel's "Daphnis et Chloé" featuring the five flutists of Flute Force. . . . ¶ July 2 at 8: Britten's "Phantasy Quartet" for Oboe and Strings, Brahms's Clarinet Quintet, and Beethoven's Serenade for Flute, Violin, and Viola. (Washington Square Park. No tickets necessary. In case of rain, concerts are held at N.Y.U.'s Loeb Student Center Auditorium, Washington Sq. and LaGuardia Pl.)

RECITALS

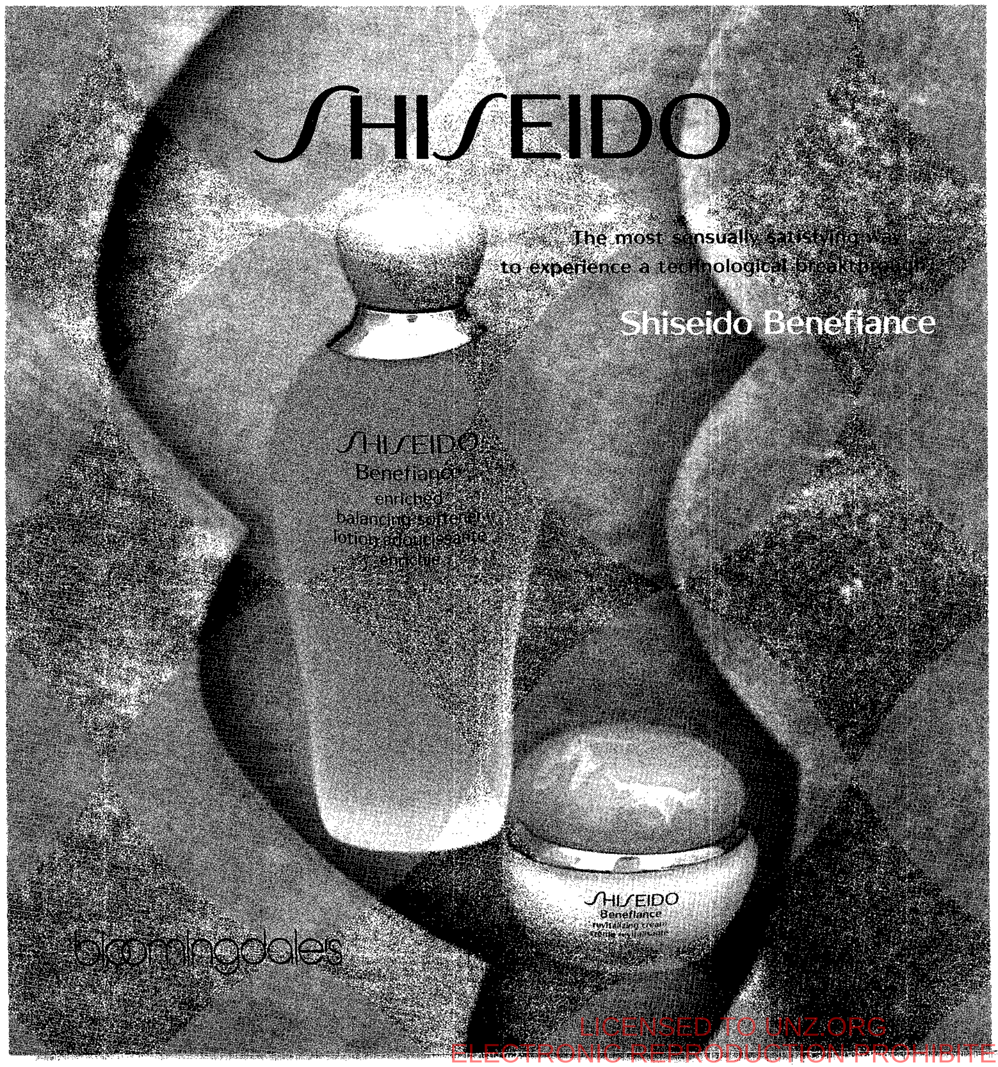
Bargemusic—June 20 at 7:30 and June 23 at 4: Violist Cynthia Phelps and pianist Judith Gordon perform Enescu's "Concertpiece," violinist Stephanie Chase and cellist Ronald Thomas play Kodály's Duo, and all join for Schumann's Piano Quartet. . . . ¶ June 27 at 7:30 and June 30 at 4: Bargemusic regulars have frequent opportunities to appreciate the exemplary violinistry of Mark Peskanov (whose renditions of the "Kreutzer" Sonata set the boat a-rocking this spring). In these concerts, he'll be joined by three family members: his brother Alexander (a pianist), Alexander's wife, Lu Ann (a flutist), and his cousin Polina Vyshko (also a pianist). Their wide-ranging program includes piano works by Chopin, violin sonatas by Beethoven (in E-Flat Major) and Grieg, and Poulenc's Flute Sonata. . . . ¶ June 28 at 7:30: Vocal and chamber music by Schubert, including his "Trout" Quintet, with the Messrs. Peskanov among the performers. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061.)

Toy Piano Grows Up—For better or for worse, the toy piano has moved into a niche of respectability on the fringe of serious music-making. John Cage seems to have been the first composer to champion the instrument: his "Music for Amplified Toy Pianos" (1960) remains a keystone of its repertoire. The field has recently burgeoned thanks to the efforts of a tiny band of ultra-dedicated toy pianists, who have delved into subtleties of timbre, investigated the properties of different historical and modern toy instruments, and persuaded composers to provide music for them to play. In this recital, Wendy Mae Chambers performs pieces by fourteen composers, including Cage and herself. Listeners may be inspired to book their reservations for the Toy Piano Convention in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where she will be performing in August. (479 Gallery, 594 Broadway, fourth floor. June 20 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

Island Baroque—Violinist Laura Frautschi and harpsichordist Ilan Rechtman play Handel's six violin sonatas, spread over two weeks. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 1-718 885-2478. June 23 and June 30 at noon.)

Uptown Sundays—June 23 at 6 and 8: Pianist Yael Weiss performs Schumann's "Humoreske" and several of Chopin's Études, in addition to the first movement of Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Sonata. . . . ¶ June 30 at 6 and 8: Piano trios by Mozart and Ilan Rechtman. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. No tickets necessary.)

Midtown Mondays—Free concerts in an elegantly appointed music salon. June 24 at 8: Maria Kitsopoulos, one of two cellists recently tapped for the New York Philharmonic's cello section, plays music by Schumann and Rachmaninoff, with pianist Ilan Rechtman assisting. . . . ¶ July 1 at 8: Violinist Laura Frautschi



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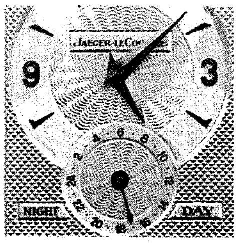

THE REVERSO DUO'S CASE SWIVELS TO REVEAL ANOTHER WATCH, WHERE A 24-HOUR HAND TELLS THE GLOBAL TRAVELER WHETHER IT'S A.M. OR P.M. IN THE SECOND TIME-ZONE. GOLD HANDS MATCH THE CASE IN THE 18-CARAT GOLD VERSION.

JAEGER-LECOULTRE

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WRITERS' HAVENS

Schiller liked to keep rotting apples in his desk drawer. Toni Morrison makes herself a cup of coffee and watches the dawn. Writers have needs. Here are a few places in New York to satisfy them.

Good Old-Fashioned Procrastinating—If New York City went looking for a room of its own, it probably couldn't do better than the Main Reading Room of the New York Public Library, with its fifty-foot ceiling, its rows of tables long as trees, its constantly murmuring silence. Still, no workroom is so perfect that you can't leave it to go poke around. Down the hall to the left, you can peek into the Berg Collection of English and American Literature and see a scholar holding some fragile, precious thing: a letter from Jane Austen, say, or "What a Dog's Death Caused," composed in pencil by an eleven-year-old Stanley Kunitz. Downstairs, you can hang out by the two unmarked oak doors just southwest of Astor Hall, behind which writers—the kind with signed book contracts—actually write. When the doors do open, out pours the sound of manual typewriters. The fourth floor houses further anachronisms. Everything archived in the George Arents Collection is vaguely tobacco-related: humidors, snuff bottles, a cigar-store Indian, a self-portrait with pipe by E. E. Cummings (signed with capitals), a mantelpiece carved with the once unpreposterous legend "The man who smokes thinks like a sage and acts like a Samaritan." (Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.)

Notes on a Hangover—Writers make good gatecrashers; it's practically a job description. And what better place to practice this insinuating pursuit than here in the publishing capital? Formal wear is required to crash the fanciest literary events, such as the Morgan Library Reading of the Academy of American Poets or the annual PEN American Literary Gala (be sure to take the centerpiece at the end of the evening—very old-money), but parties for the quarterlies are easier: at the frequent shindigs they hold at *The Paris Review*, one may spy the kudu that editor George Plimpton bagged in Africa and admire the office pool table bedizened with crudités. Downtown, at gatherings for the newish *Open City*, one intercepts sultry book-jacket glances over Cheetos beside the open bar. But the simplest walk-in by far is the book party: everyone present feels ashamed (since they haven't read the book yet), so gatecrashers, with their bluff good will, are welcome.

Clean Sheets—"I subscribe to the same school of thought as Nabokov: what I'm writing has to *come out the end of my arm,*" James Grissom says. The Baton Rouge native is working, in his off hours, on a Tennessee Williams tribute; in his on ones, at Kate's Paperie, he provisions writers with paper—polka-dotted paper, flower-petalled paper, metallic paper that feels like alligator hide. But for serious projects he would only consider the Amalfi. "That's the brand Updike likes," he says, producing a sheet as smooth as pressed Italian linen. "Most writers are really chintzy at the beginning. On their first drafts, when they're going through reams of paper on a daily basis, they stick with the low-end stuff—I mean, cheap: Big Chief tablets, legal pads. But when they have something ready to go, to an agent or a publisher, then they'll ante up." (8 W. 13th St. 633-0570.)

Your Own Private Yaddo—The Writer's Room, on Astor Place, is an artists' colony of sorts, set in a former Conran's business office instead of a famously haunted upstate mansion. "*And Conran's didn't furnish the place with* garbage, either," the director, Donna Brodie, says. Here tenants can write in private carrels at any hour of the day or night. Soft lights twist down around them on coppery vines, and there's always a couch, a blanket, a rhyming dictionary nearby. "It's good to have a place to go that's solely for work," longtime denizen Judith Rossner says; she has written two novels here and is working on a third. "It has the comforts of home, but it's not a home situation." (10 Astor Pl. 254-6995.)

Binding Love—Writers who think that books aren't honored as they should be (name one who doesn't) would do well to visit the Grolier Club, a haven devoted to the worship of the book. The six-story club is jammed with lovingly displayed tomes and sundry bookish wonders, from its lofty ground-floor exhibition hall (currently showing handmade books by Antonio Frasconi) through its magisterial *hallways (harboring such oddities as Lord* Spencer's cabinet, which served as a sort of travelling card catalogue on the eighteenth-century nobleman's book-buying sorties) and up to its Old Dutch drinking room (where members occasionally meet—no one knows why—for oyster stew and ice cream). A serious collection—say, cartoons from the eighteen-twenties depicting the divorce proceedings of Queen Caroline of England—is a prerequisite for membership: the only prerequisite for a visit is the knowledge that this gem of a place exists. (47 E. 60th St. For more information, call 838-6690.)

and Mr. Rechtman perform Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 7, as well as works by Sarasate. (Mansfield Hotel, 12 W. 44th St.)

Grete Sultan—The nonagenarian pianist, a noted European champion of the American avant-garde (especially the music of John Cage), performs Bach's "Goldberg" Variations. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. June 25 at 8.)

Musical Chairs—The ensemble offers vocal and instrumental chamber music by Martinů, Shostakovich, and Dvořák (his D-Major Piano Quartet). (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. June 30 at 2. Tickets at the door.)

Walter J. Turnbull—New York audiences usually see Mr. Turnbull from behind, directing the Boys Choir of Harlem (which he founded, in 1968), but every now and again he faces downstage as a tenor soloist. In this recital, he'll perform music by Purcell, Schumann, and Poulenc, as well as a selection of spirituals. Pianist Warren G. Wilson assists. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. June 30 at 7:30.)

OUT OF TOWN

Opera Festival of New Jersey—Opening performances of the season, which continues through July 20. June 22 and June 28 at 8 and June 30 at 2: "Così Fan Tutte." . . . ¶ June 29 at 8: "La Traviata." (The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, N.J. 1-609 936-1500.)

Caramoor—Opening concerts of the festival's fifty-first season, which continues through August 11. June 22 at 8:30: A concert performance of Rossini's "La Cenerentola." . . . ¶ June 23 at 5:30: The St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble performs an all-Bach program that includes his "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 2. . . . ¶ June 27 at 4:15: A recital by violinist Elisa Barston. . . . ¶ June 28 at 8: The ebullient Irish pianist John O'Conor offers four nocturnes by John Field and assists the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble in Mozart's Quintet for Piano and Winds and E-Flat-Major Piano Quartet. . . . ¶ June 29 at 8:30: Peter Oundjian, on leave from his position as the Tokyo String Quartet's first violinist, conducts Rossini's "La Gazza Ladra" Overture, Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 2 (with Stella Simakova), and Schubert's Symphony No. 5. . . . ¶ June 30 at 5:30: The Juilliard String Quartet offers quartets by Mozart, Carter (his Second), and Beethoven (in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 131). (Katonah, N.Y. 1-914 232-1252.)

Maverick Concerts—The festival's eighty-first season runs through September 1. June 23 at 3: The St. Lawrence String Quartet plays Schumann's A-Major Quartet and Osvaldo Golijov's "Yiddishbbuk Inscriptions"; flutist Eugenia Zukerman joins the ensemble in Mozart's D-Major Flute Quartet and Arthur Foote's "A Night Piece." . . . ¶ June 30 at 3: The Angeles String Quartet offers quartets by Haydn (in C Major, Op. 64, No. 1) and Brahms (in A Minor, Op. 51, No. 2); Frederic Hand assists in a guitar quintet by Boccherini. (Woodstock, N.Y. 1-914 679-8217.)

Music Mountain—June 23 at 3: The Penderecki String Quartet plays string quartets by Mozart, Debussy, and Schubert (his "Quartettsatz"), in addition to Mozart's Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major (with Michael Boriskin) . . . ¶ June 30 at 3: The St. Petersburg String Quartet offers works by Mozart, Zurab Nadarejshvili, and Schnittke (his Piano Quintet, with Samuel Bartos assisting). (Falls Village, Connecticut. For information, call 1-860 824-7126.)

Tanglewood—Opening concerts of the season, which continues through September 2. June 28 at 8:30: Soprano Benita Valente and pianist Gilbert Kalish assist the Boston Symphony Chamber Players in a program of Beethoven and Bolcom. . . . ¶ June 29 at 8:30: The Juilliard String Quartet plays quartets by Mozart, Carter (his Second), and Beethoven (in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 131). . . . ¶ June 30 at 2:30: Ms. Valente, Mr. Kalish, and the Boston Symphony Chamber Players offer music by Debussy, Stravinsky, and de Falla, with Richard Westerfield occasionally presiding from the podium. (Lenox, Mass. 1-413 637-5165.)

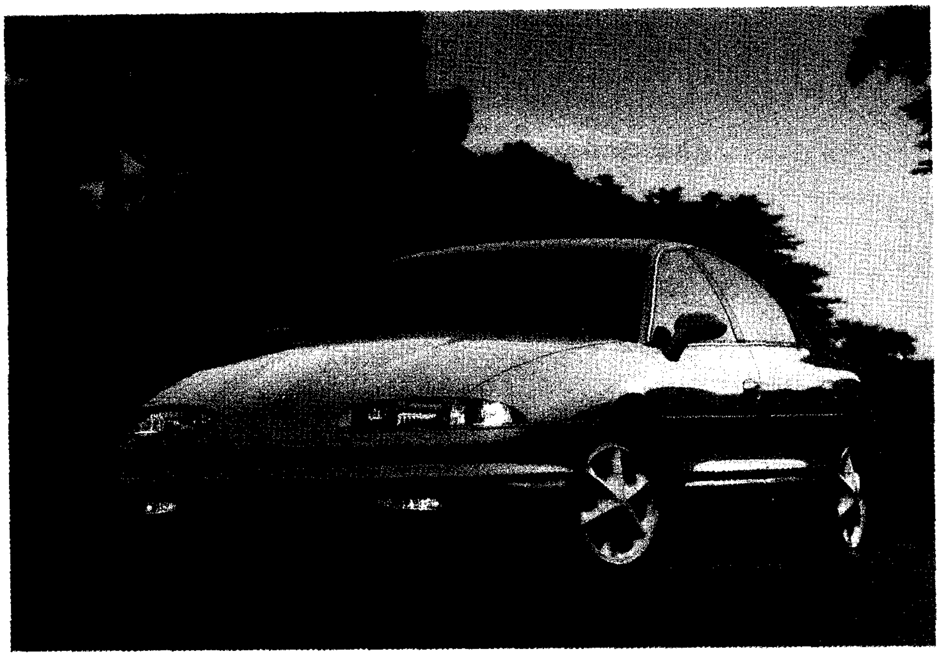
ABOVE AND BEYOND

Rows and Rows of the Finest Virtuosos—June 22 at noon: Marching bands and costumed sea creatures proceed around Coney Island's amusement park in the annual Mermaid Parade. To participate, register by noon next to the Parachute Jump, in Steeplechase Park, Surf Ave. at W. 17th St., Brooklyn, or call 1-718 372-5159. . . . ¶ June 30 at noon: The annual Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade begins at 52nd Street and heads down Fifth Avenue. At 2, marchers will observe a moment of silence for those who have died of AIDS. Later there will be waterfront dancing and fireworks in the West Village. For more information, call 807-7433.

Readings—June 21 at 7:30: Tom De Haven, author of "Derby Dugan's Depression Funnies," reads from that noir novel about a comic-strip writer, then talks with Art Spiegelman, who illustrated it. (Barnes & Noble, 4 Astor Pl. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ June 25 at 12:30: Poets Stephen Dunn ("Landscape at the End of the Century") and Patricia Smith ("Close to Death") read from their work. (Belvedere Park, near the Hoboken Ferry landing in Battery Park City. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ June 25 at 7:30: Junot Diaz and Richard Price read from their work. (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—June 19 at 6: Architectural historian John Kriskiewicz looks back at the days when the New York area, with its system of boulevards, parkways, and arterial highways, was a model of metropolitan road design. (Municipal Arts Society, 457 Madison Ave. 935-3960.) . . . ¶ June 24 at 6:30: Guillaume Pellerin, the proprietor of the Vauville Gardens, in Normandy, unearths bygone horticultural habits with slides of his collection of garden tools. (French Institute–Alliance Française, 22 E. 60th St. 355-6100.)

LAURENT CILLUFFO



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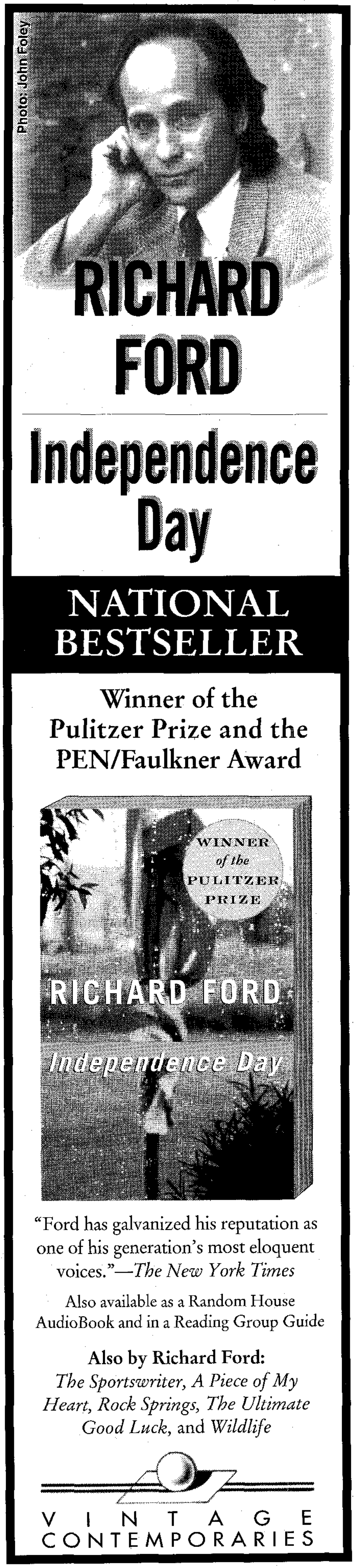
[1] Chicago Tribune, 6/11/95 [2] Strategic Vision's™ 1995 Vehicle Experience Study is based on a total of 31,440 new vehicle buyer responses indicating owner's positive and negative experiences during the first 90 days of ownership. [3] Strategic Vision's 1996 Vehicle Experience Study™ surveyed 35,652 Oct.-Nov. new vehicle buyers of 200+ models during the first 90 days of ownership. SmartLease: $399 per month for 36 months. **$2,600 DOWN PAYMENT.** $3,448.33 due at lease signing (first month's payment of $398.33, plus $450 refundable security deposit, plus down-payment). Taxes, license, title fees, and insurance extra. GMAC must approve lease. Example based on Aurora model: $35,500 M.S.R.P., including destination charge. Monthly payments total $14,339.88. Payments may be higher in AL, CA, CT, HI, NY, RI, TX and VA. Option to buy at lease end at price determined at lease signing. Mileage charge of 15 cents per mile over 36,000 miles. Lessee pays for excess wear. You must take retail delivery out of retailer stock by 10/2/96. This is a special GMAC program. See your participating retailer for qualification details.



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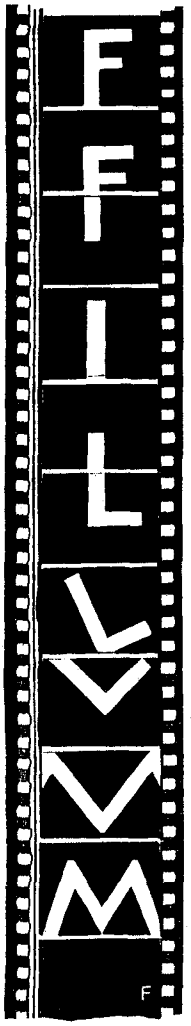
THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING



ERASER—Arnold Schwarzenegger and Vanessa Williams play the guardian and the guarded, respectively, in Charles Russell's action film about the Federal Witness Protection Program. Opening June 21. (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME—Disney's animated musical version of Victor Hugo's novel, with voices by Tom Hulce, Demi Moore, Kevin Kline, and Jason Alexander. Directed by Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale. Opening June 21.

LONE STAR—Writer-director John Sayles's multigenerational drama about life along the Texas-Mexico border, starring Chris Cooper, Elizabeth Peña, Kris Kristofferson, and Matthew McConaughey. Opening June 21. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE LOW LIFE—A black comedy that centers on an aspiring writer (Rory Cochrane) and his friends (Sean Astin, Ron Livingston, Kyra Sedgwick) in Los Angeles, directed by George Hickenlooper. Opening June 28. (Quad Cinema.)

MAGIC HUNTER—Ildikó Enyedi's film about a Budapest policeman (Gary Kemp) who changes his life when he is given seven supernatural bullets. In Hungarian. Opening June 21. (Sutton and Village East Cinemas.)

MAYBE . . . MAYBE NOT—A philandering waiter (Til Schweiger), whose girlfriend (Katja Riemann) has evicted him, moves into the apartment of a gay friend (Joachim Krol), in a comedy written and directed by Sönke Wortmann. In German. Opening June 28. (Angelika Film Center.)

THE NUTTY PROFESSOR—Eddie Murphy and Jada Pinkett star in Tom Shadyac's remake of the 1963 Jerry Lewis comedy. Opening June 28.

A PERFECT CANDIDATE—Reviewed below in Current Films. June 19-July 2.

PURPLE NOON—Reviewed below in Revivals. Opening June 28.

THE SEARCH FOR ONE-EYED JIMMY—Nick Turturro, Steve Buscemi, Ray (Boom Boom) Mancini, Samuel L. Jackson, and Anne Meara star in writer-director Sam Henry Kass's comedy about a Red Hook, Brooklyn, native who has disappeared. Opening June 21. (Cinema Village.)

STRIPTEASE—A comedy in which Demi Moore plays a divorced Miami mother who needs funds to regain custody of her daughter (Rumer Willis) and turns to topless dancing to earn them. With Ving Rhames. Written and directed by Andrew Bergman, from the novel by Carl Hiaasen. Opening June 28.

VIVE L'AMOUR—Tsai Ming-Liang's drama about the intertwined lives of a middle-aged real-estate agent (Yang Kuei-Mei), a young gay burial-plot salesman (Lee Kang-Sheng), and a street vendor (Chen Chao-Jung) in Taipei. In Mandarin. Opening June 28. (Quad Cinema.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 38.)

THE ARRIVAL—Writer-director David Twohy has a thing for the polar ice caps: they figured in his less than remarkable script for "Waterworld," and they figure in his latest project, a sci-fi drama about disguised aliens taking over the planet (the plot has them building power plants that cause the poles to melt). Charlie Sheen is a radio astronomer who tracks down the invaders in order to expose them. The movie has so little going for it that the newly clean-shaven face of Ron Silver, who plays the bad guy, is more interesting than the special effects. (That chin has been hidden for *so long.*) Twohy thaws out some ideas that had their heyday at drive-ins in the fifties (body-snatching paranoia, desert locales); the movie never gets much scarier than an old "Twilight Zone" episode.—B.D. (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

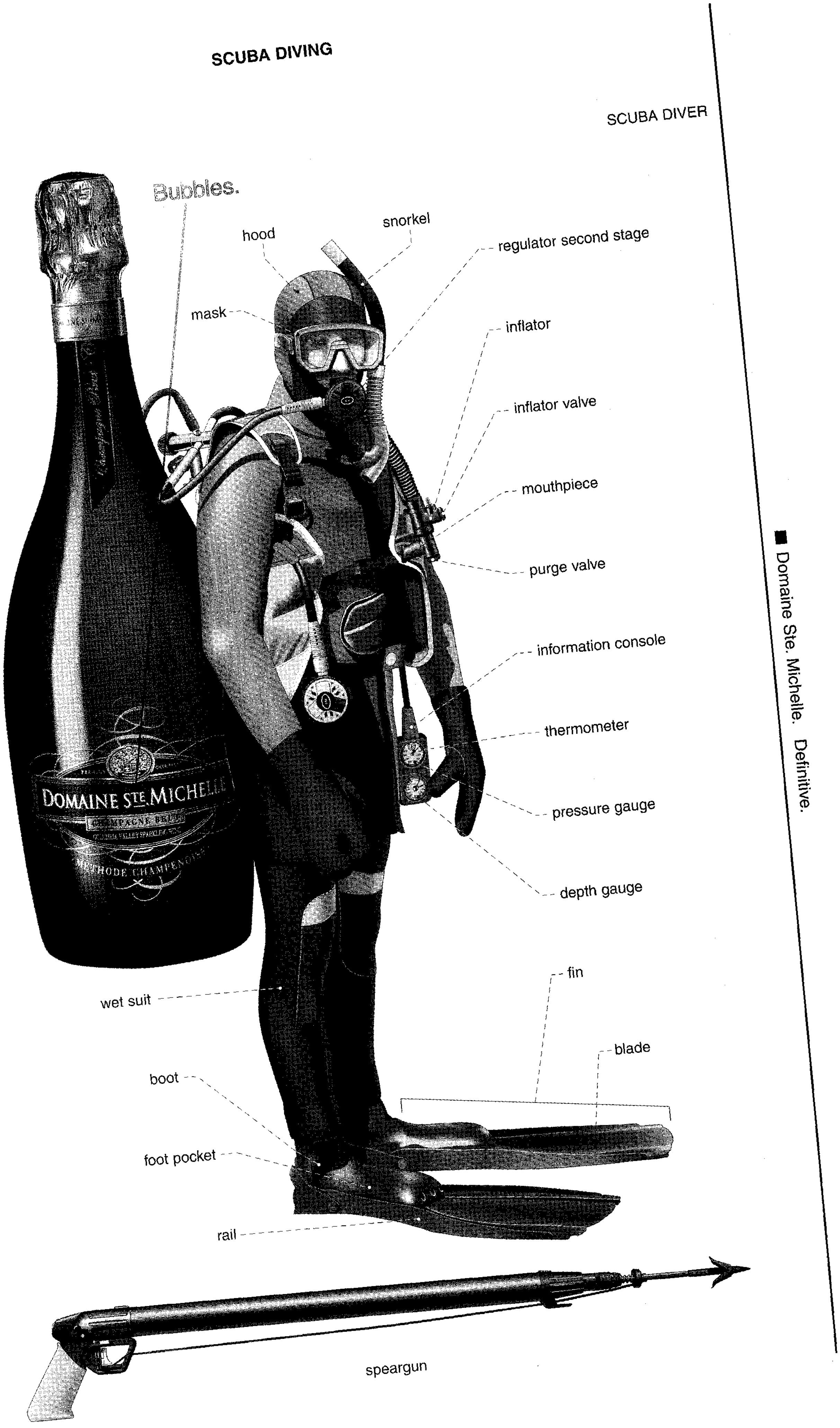
THE CABLE GUY—Jim Carrey stars in Ben Stiller's black comedy about an over-friendly cable-TV technician. With Matthew Broderick, Leslie Mann, and George Segal. Written by Lou Holtz, Jr. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Gemini, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

COLD COMFORT FARM—John Schlesinger's eccentric rural comedy is based on a 1932 novel by Stella Gibbons. The bright, sophisticated young heroine, Flora Poste (Kate Beckinsale), goes to live with obscure relatives in Sussex, and, appalled by their ignorance and their dour inertia, sets out to change their stubborn ways; she's Jeeves in skirts, subverting the blind workings of Fate to her own ends. Beckinsale keeps her composure while veteran character actors—Eileen Atkins, Sheila Burrell, Stephen Fry, Freddie Jones, Joanna Lumley, and Ian McKellen—attempt to dazzle her, and us, with their virtuosity. Schlesinger, working from a script by Malcolm Bradbury, maintains a steady rhythm and a light, cheerful mood.—T.R. (5/13/96) (Lincoln Square and Village Theatre VII.)

DRAGONHEART—Industrial Light & Magic's latest stunning computer creation is a fire-breathing dragon, but Rob Cohen's film fails to capitalize on its twenty-million-dollar investment. Initially, the dragon slayer (Dennis Quaid) teams up with the dragon (voiced by Sean Connery) to rook unsuspecting townsfolk by faking the monster's killing, but this playful opening is a cheat: the story quickly turns its attention to an evil king (David Thewlis) and a people who must be freed. Cohen's pacing and direction are strong, but the cheerless script gives the dragon fewer and fewer opportunities for fun, and the movie dies a "Braveheart" death.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th St. East, Waverly, and Ziegfeld.)

HEAVY—The hero of James Mangold's low-budget independent film is a fat, balding, terribly shy man named Victor (Pruitt Taylor Vince), who makes pizzas at an upstate New York roadhouse owned by his mother (Shelley Winters). In a more conventional picture the sight of a middle-aged sad sack living with Shelley Winters would be enough to send viewers sprinting for the exits, but Mangold (who also wrote the script) establishes a mood that dispels the possibility of either pathos or hysteria. He's alert to the lived-in beauties of the upstate landscape, and his images have a restrained, laconic lyricism that captures both the romantic lushness and the gray loneliness of the setting. This is a little-people movie that's modest in the right way: it's less interested in striking attitudes toward its disappointed characters than in simply observing the texture of life in their particular nowhere. Also with Liv Tyler, Deborah Harry, and Evan Dando. Cinematography by Michael Barrow.—T.R. (6/17/96) (Film Forum.)

THE HORSEMAN ON THE ROOF—Jean-Paul Rappeneau's costume picture stars Olivier Martinez as Angelo, an Italian on the run in the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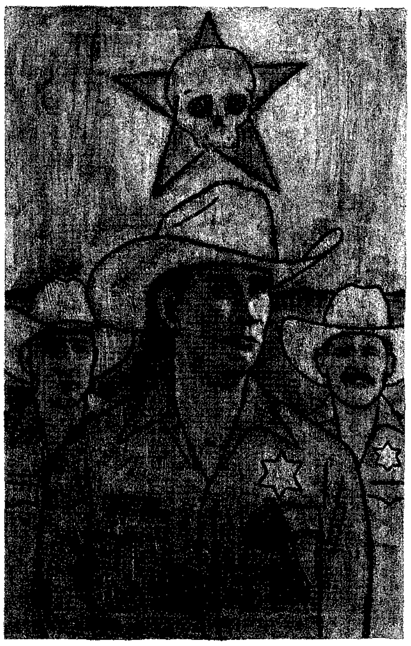
Provence of the eighteen-thirties. The movie is like its hero: handsome, dashing, and almost completely devoid of interest. The grand plot turns on a cholera outbreak that devastates the region—"It's the greatest epidemic ever!" cries a doctor, as if he were helping with the publicity. Angelo has to leap, gallop, and rush from one disaster area to the next, doing good works while trying to evade the dastardly Austrians pursuing him. Finally he descends from a roof into the house of a woman so pale, mysterious, and desirable that she can, under French law, be played only by Juliette Binoche. The actress does a fine job of it, too, lending this rambling tale a still center. But the fact that the suffering couple are doomed never to consummate their passion—she's looking for her *husband*, of all people—says it all about the movie's weak nerve. In French.—A.L. (6/10/96) (Quad Cinema. . . . ¶ Paris; through June 27.)

I Shot Andy Warhol—The story of Valerie Solanas (Lili Taylor), the deranged woman who, in 1968, ambushed Warhol at the Factory and nearly killed him. The director, Mary Harron, tries to depict Solanas as a complex, tragicomic figure, but the protagonist can't bear the weight that the film puts on her, and Taylor's monotonous performance doesn't do much to lighten the load. The languid-hysterical Factory atmosphere feels accurate, though, and so does Jared Harris's witty portrayal of Warhol. Also with Stephen Dorff (as Candy Darling), Michael Imperioli (Ondine), and Donovan Leitch (Gerard Malanga).—T.R. (5/13/96) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Mission: Impossible—This action blockbuster's obvious selling points are nostalgia for the long-running TV series and the presence of a big star, Tom Cruise, but the *real* star here is the director, Brian De Palma. His elegant, baroque, multilayered style is so perfectly suited to the material that even the most blatant commercial strategies of David Koepp and Robert Towne's screenplay somehow wind up playing to his strengths. Also with Jon Voight, Emmanuelle Béart, Ving Rhames, and Vanessa Redgrave.—T.R. (6/3/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Metro Cinema, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)



Opening June 21, Matthew McConaughey, Chris Cooper, and Kris Kristofferson in "Lone Star."

JAMES BURRIS

Moll Flanders—*Robin Wright is the* eighteenth-century Londoner in an epic written and directed by Pen Densham, based on the novel by Defoe. With Morgan Freeman, Stockard Channing, John Lynch, and Brenda Fricker. (Art Greenwich Twin, Coronet, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Orpheum VII.)

A Perfect Candidate—American political campaigns have become a hollow battle between behind-the-scenes image-makers: that's the message of this enjoyable but finally cynical and opportunistic documentary by R. J. Cutler (producer of "The War Room") and David Van Taylor about the 1994 Virginia Senate race, in which the Republican, Oliver North, attempted to unseat the Democratic incumbent, Charles Robb. Each candidate struggles to shake off a bad reputation, North's because of Iran-Contra, Robb's because of allegations that he's consorted with a bimbo; the film is structured like a backstage look at actors in rehearsal, the idea—not a very deep or new one—being that politics is show business. Robb looks like a shady Elmer Fudd as he forgets where he stands on issues, tries desperately to interact with common people in a grocery store, and loses his train of thought in the debate. North, on the other hand, could be a movie star: playing to the camera like a cross between John Wayne and Jimmy Stewart, he comes off as a wrongly maligned homespun patriot.—S.K. (Film Forum; June 19-July 2.)

The Phantom—An attempt to revive the Saturday-matinée comic-book serial—but Simon Wincer's direction lacks the thrill of the earlier cliffhangers, even with the aid of an "Indiana Jones" alumnus, scriptwriter Jeffrey Boam. It's too bad, because this well-produced adventure has handsome thirties styling, the simplified plot of a good children's film, and some nifty tongue-in-cheek acting: Billy Zane

SUMMER PLEASURES FROM HENRY HOLT

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Introduction by Salman Rushdie

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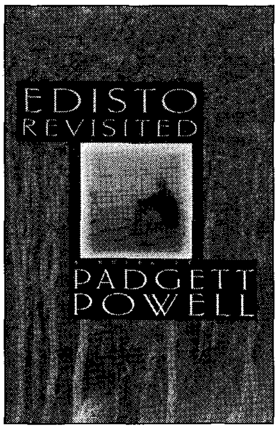

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HENRY HOLT

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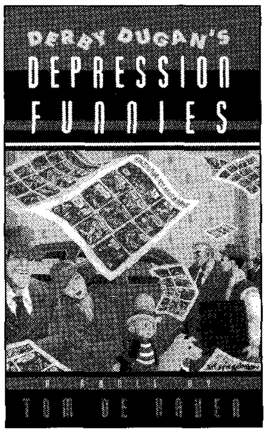
A Metropolitan Book



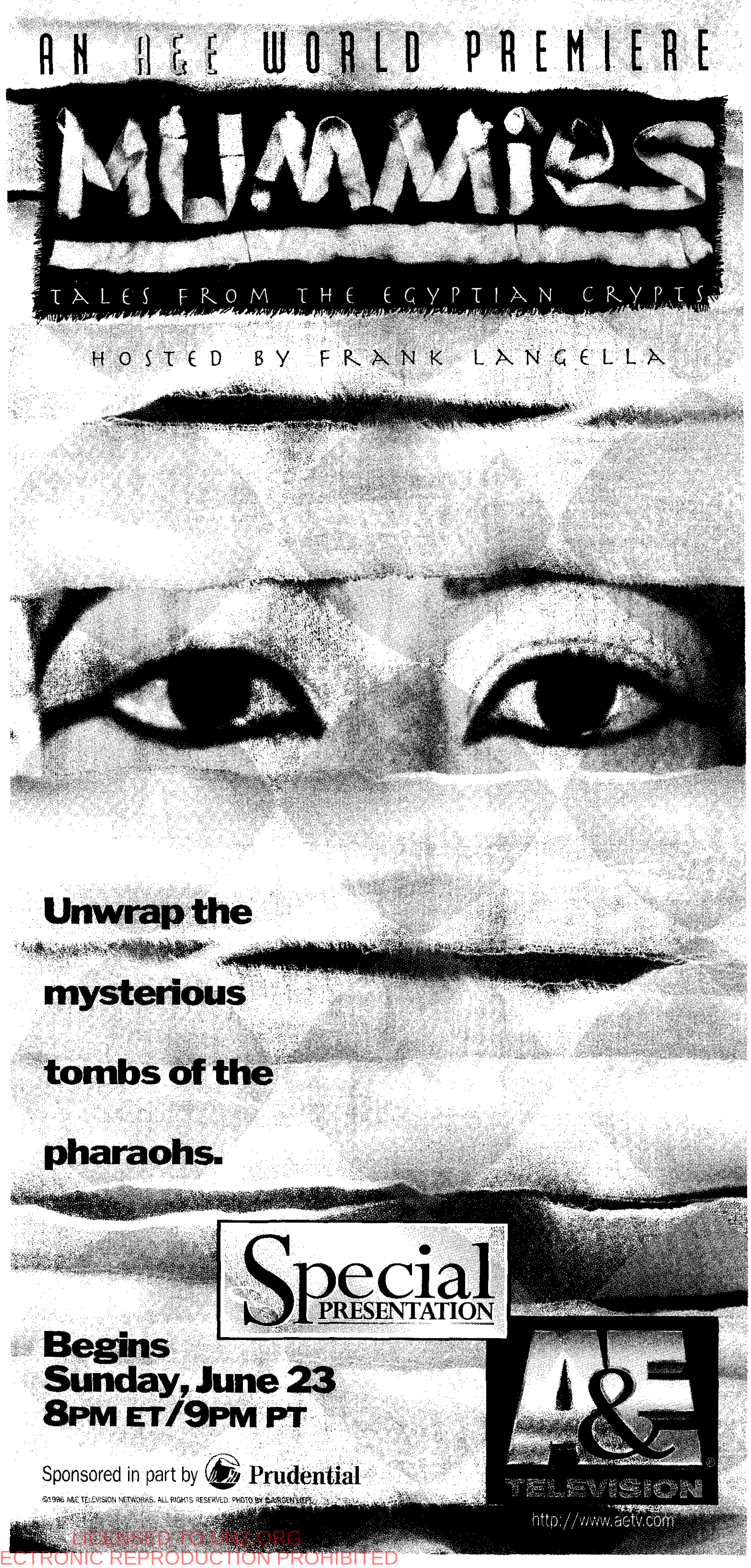
gives a winning, heroic performance as the hunk in purple tights, while Treat Williams hams up his villain's role with arch humor and dash. The picture is light entertainment that will look fine on videocassette, but the enterprise could have been really successful if Wincer had established an exciting rhythm. The energy is there, but the movie never takes off.—B.D. (Art Greenwich Twin, Astor Plaza, East 85th Street, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, and 34th Street Showplace.)

The Rock—In Michael Bay's long, sadistic, and aggressively stupid action movie, Sean Connery and Nicolas Cage break into Alcatraz to dislodge a group of terrorists—commanded by Ed Harris—who have occupied the island and have aimed missiles filled with deadly nerve gas at San Francisco. The picture, which was produced by Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer (the team responsible for "Flashdance" and "Top Gun"), is designed to provide non-stop mindless fun, like a "Die Hard" movie, but Bay's manic, rhythmless direction turns the action sequences into incoherent spasms of violence. And there's not much pleasure in watching three resourceful actors doing time in a Simpson-Bruckheimer production; by the end, they all look like broken men. Also with Michael Biehn, William Forsythe, and John Spencer.—T.R. (6/17/96) (84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 1, Embassy 2, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas.)

Spy Hard—Leslie Nielsen plays "Steele, Dick Steele," an idiotic Bond-like secret agent called in by the American government to stop a cackling, armless villain named General Rancor (Andy Griffith) from destroying the world. As usual, the best gag of all is Nielsen's suave, serious, almost pathologically unembarrassed way with nonsensical dialogue. The problem is that Bond films are so campy, excessive, and dated to begin with that the parody here quickly begins to seem secondhand. Directed by Rick Friedberg.—S.K. (86th Street East Twin, Embassy 4, Gotham Cinema, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas.)

Stealing Beauty—Bernardo Bertolucci's new picture offers a number of beauties, and they are stolen in different ways. There is the grace of the Tuscan countryside around Siena, which Bertolucci rescues from lingering prettiness with some startling, impatient editing—when did a feature film last suggest new angles on photographing landscape? And there is the loveliness of Liv Tyler, who plays the teen-age heroine, Lucy; the moments when the action stops to let the camera study her face are not just the most reflective ones but also, in an odd way, the most dramatic. If only the story, a fable of lost innocence, were as strong. Lucy arrives at a villa full of languid expatriates—among them a sculptor (Donal McCann) and a dying playwright (Jeremy Irons)—where she will lose her virginity and find out who her real father is. Neither of these events is surprising, let along gripping, and the film slowly dwindles into a record of the rich at play—poolside Henry James. The screenplay, brittle and precious, is by Bertolucci and Susan Minot.—A.L. (6/10/96) (Angelika Film Center, Beekman, and Lincoln Square.)

Twister—Another hectic thriller from Jan De Bont, who had a runaway hit with "Speed." The new movie is, if possible, even more content-free; all you get is a bunch of terrifying tornadoes, pursued with glee by a married pair of professional storm chasers, Bill (Bill Paxton) and Jo (Helen Hunt). These two are supposed to be getting a divorce, but you don't really care what happens to them, or to the unfortunate Melissa (Jami Gertz), who aims to take Jo's place—you're too busy having your mind blown by the houses, cars, and cows tumbling across the skies.—A.L. (5/20/96) (Criterion Center, Gemini, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Village East Cinemas.)



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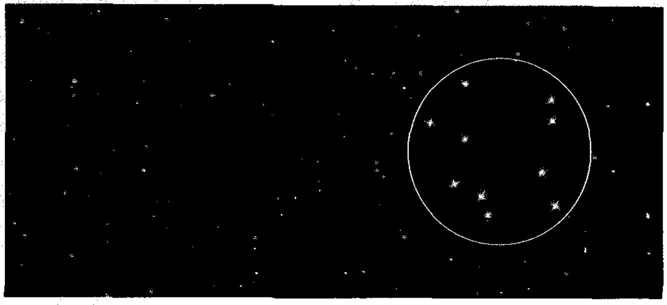

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ALSO PLAYING

ANGELS & INSECTS (reviewed in our issue of 1/29/96): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **ANTONIA'S LINE:** Cinema 3. . . . **THE BIRDCAGE** (3/18/96): Baronet, Criterion Center, and 62nd & Broadway. . . . **BROKEN ARROW** (2/19/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **DEAD MAN WALKING** (1/8/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **DIABOLIQUE** (4/1/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **EDDIE:** Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, Embassy 3, Guild, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **EXECUTIVE DECISION:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **LEAVING LAS VEGAS** (11/6/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **MA SAISON PRÉFÉRÉE:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **NELLY AND MONSIEUR ARNAUD** (4/22/96): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **PRIMAL FEAR:** Murray Hill Cinemas, National Twin, and 72nd Street East. . . . **SENSE AND SENSIBILITY** (12/18/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE SWITCHBLADE SISTERS:** Angelika Film Center and Carnegie Hall Cinemas. . . . **WALLACE AND GROMIT: THE BEST OF AARDMAN ANIMATION:** Quad Cinema. . . . **WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE** (5/27/96): Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, and Lincoln Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Baronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy I, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gemini I and 2, Second Ave. at 64th St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema I and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton I and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly I and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

California Split (1974)—Robert Altman (working from a script by Joseph Walsh) plunges into the betting action in L.A. and Reno, relaying an electric scent of jumpy nerves. When his gamblers' stakes are on the table, their lives are on the line—what counts is handling the tension. George Segal can barely hack it; a writer, he seems to be seeking out luck's secrets. So he's drawn to Elliott Gould, who looks like the real thing: a natural gambler whose soul calls out for winning hands and lucky numbers. As they hop from ponies to poker to prizefights, we come to see their crapshoot of an existence as a quest not just for thrills and highs but for some pagan form of validation. Altman lets us savor the kick of gambling even as he demonstrates its limits. Gould and Segal, past masters of prolonged adolescence, conjure the prickly chemistry of buddies who make each other nervous. And the supporting players flit through the gambling halls as if they're locked in a self-destructive trance—you feel that their shirts must be soaked through. Lou Lombardo did the superb, intuitive editing.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; June 21-23.)

City of Women (1980)—Federico Fellini's look at female liberation starts out amusingly enough, with some precious spoofs of feminist cant ("The vagina is like a shellfish that contains the sounds of the sea . . . but *men* give it names like 'snatch' and 'patootie' "). But as the film goes on, and on and on, Marcello Mastroianni, once again playing the director's surrogate, seems little more than an insouciant infant, making goo-goo sounds ("Smick, smack") as he toddles from one dream figure to the next, almost all of them resembling women from Fellini's previous movies. Fellini said that the film was "about the cinema seen through the masturbatory discovery of its own femininity," and "about one man, a man who invents women. She is his metaphor, his obscurity, the part of himself he doesn't know." The auteur co-wrote the script with Bernardino Zapponi; the luscious cinematography is by Giuseppe Rotunno. In Italian.—M.S. (Anthology Film Archives; June 21 and June 29.)

Deliverance (1972)—Four middle-class Georgians canoe down the untamed, soon-to-be-dammed Cahulawassee River, and the inspired director, John Boorman, presents the ensuing survival drama as high macho adventure *and* nightmare. Under the guidance of a blustery outdoorsman named Lewis (Burt Reynolds, in a potent, daredevil performance), the mild-mannered, pipe-smoking Ed (Jon Voight) proves himself in rites of violence. James Dickey's novel depicted the wild river trip as an enrichment for Lewis and Ed, despite the dire consequences for their companions, the affable Bobby (Ned Beatty) and the sane, gentle Drew (Ronny Cox). Boorman, however, cleaves to a spooky, neutral tone. The combined attractiveness and foolishness of taking extreme action is the point of the film, which is both gut-clutching and mesmerizing. Boorman captures the spring of a canoe when the current snags it, the terror of a vertiginous drop, the ominous stillness of a gorge. The movie has a mysterious beauty, like a landscape changed drastically by nightfall. Dickey wrote the script and plays a lawman; the cinematography is by Vilmos Zsigmond.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; June 25-26.)

The Eternal Return (1943)—Jean Delannoy directed Jean Cocteau's modern-dress adaptation of the Tristan and Isolde legend. Jean Marais, in a celebrated medieval-looking pullover sweater, and the straight-silk-haired, snow-blond Madeleine Sologne are absurdly glamorous lovers; though the film has the decorative look of ballet and is heavy and stilted, they became the rage of Paris. With Yvonne de Bray and the dwarf Piéral. In French.—P.K. (Florence Gould Hall; July 2.)

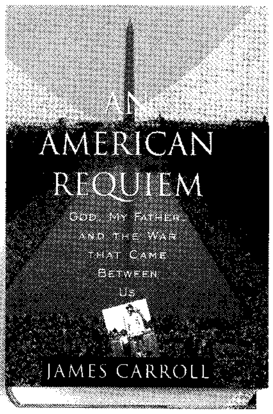
Fingers (1978)—Directing his first film, the writer James Toback seems to be playing the literary adolescent's game of wanting to go crazy so he can watch his own reactions. Because he doesn't censor his masculine racial fantasies, his foolishness and his terrible ideas pour out freely. The protagonist (Harvey Keitel) is an artist with the soul of a violent hood. Toback doesn't just risk self-parody—he falls into it. Yet the film never seems ridiculous, because he's got true moviemaking fever. With Jim Brown, Tisa Farrow, and Michael V. Gazzo—P.K. (American Museum of the Moving Image; June 23.)

Gigi (1950)—Danièle Delorme as Colette's Gigi—offspring of a long line of courtesans. Gigi's grandmother (Yvonne de Bray) and her great-aunt (Gaby Morlay), both retired from active service, attempt to train her to carry on the tradition, but the virtuous Gigi violates the rules. A pleasant, unexciting movie, with Frank Villard and Jean Tissier. Directed by Jacqueline Audry. In French.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; June 28-29 and July 2.)

Klute (1971)—Jane Fonda in possibly her finest dramatic performance, as Bree, an intelligent, high-bracket call girl, in Alan J. Pakula's murder melodrama. The life surrounding Bree's profession frightens her, but the work itself has peculiar compensations—she enjoys her power over her customers. She's maternal and provocative with them, confident and contemptuously cool. She's a different girl alone—huddled in bed in her disorderly room. The suspense plot involves the ways in which prostitutes attract the forces that destroy them. Fonda is very exciting to watch: the closest closeup never reveals a false thought, and, seen on the movie streets a block away, she's Bree, not Jane Fonda, walking toward us. With Donald Sutherland, Charles Cioffi, and Roy Scheider.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; June 30-July 1.)

Loving (1970)—A beautifully sustained piece of moviemaking by Irvin Kershner. It looks at the failures of middle-class life without despising the people; it understands that they already despise themselves. George Segal is a freelance illustrator who makes good money but never makes enough money; he wriggles this way and that because he doesn't like his life. He's trying to do right by his wife (Eva Marie Saint) and his children, and still

Portraits of American Life.



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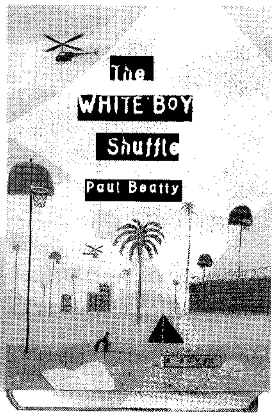

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keep the possibility open that he could yet be a dashing, gifted artist. Eva Marie Saint gives a stunning performance as a tough, gallant woman who doesn't have many illusions about her husband or herself, and Segal has a loose, informal sense of irony—he radiates likable human weakness. With Keenan Wynn and Sterling Hayden.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; June 24.)

A Night at the Opera (1935)—The Marx Brothers sometimes said that this was their best film; it isn't, but it was their greatest hit. Two beautifully stuffed American targets—grand opera and high society—are left dismantled, flapping like scarecrows. (If you ever could listen to "Il Trovatore" with a straight face, you can never do so again.) George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind did the script; Sam Wood directed. The cast includes Groucho's perennial grande-dame inamorata, Margaret Dumont, the most stately of stooges. There are also the vocalizing lovers, Kitty Carlisle and Allan Jones, whom Irving Thalberg, the producer and a master diagnostician of popular taste, put in for people (*what* people?) to "identify with," and the cruel villain, Walter Woolf King. (Incredible as it may seem, the banal romantic melodrama that intermittently wrecks the movie proved sound at the box office.)—P.K. (Symphony Space; June 25.)

Poil de Carotte (1932)—Julien Duvivier established his mastery of the sound film with this remake of his 1925 silent about the desperate estrangement of a young red-headed boy. Harry Baur plays the father, and skinny little Robert Lynen is the boy who tries to hang himself; their performances are delicate and psychologically complex, but the film achieves its lyric intensity largely through the rhythmic use of imagery. Here, Duvivier isn't the masterly entertainer that he became a few years later; this film is more exploratory, more searching. From a novel by Jules Renard, adapted by the director. In French.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; June 28-29.)

Purple Noon (1960)—Maurice Ronet and Alain Delon as decadent Americans loafing in Italy—Ronet rich and vicious, Delon poor, amoral, and murderous. When Delon tries on Ronet's clothes, it's clear that they look better on him. The director, René Clément, keeps this thriller in the sun-drenched-holiday style of travel posters, with homosexual hatred and envy festering. All it has going for it is this sensuous, kicky atmosphere; you feel as if you're breathing something beautiful and rotten. In French.—P.K. (Paris; starting June 28.)

The Spiders (1920)—Fritz Lang's enjoyably outlandish cliffhanger about a millionaire adventurer who's always slashing away at one arm or another of the titular criminal band. The first part centers on an Incan fortune, the second on a Buddha-faced diamond. Lang knew how to thread together primitive and futuristic exotica, how to milk fabulous sets and locations, and how to make claustrophobia exciting—the gimcrack storyline is strewn with subterranean cities and treasure troves. It's strictly for people who love a parade, but at its best the film neatly blends convention and invention, with uncanny strokes of movie magic (like an eerie succession of faces as a yogi reconstructs the lineage of the diamond owner), engaging bits of design (a raft that looks like a coconut), and even an adroit use of split screen. The hero's race to a hot-air balloon in the first part could serve as a primer for the action director's craft. Despite its hundred-and-thirty-eight-minute length, the movie never loses a vernal sort of silliness. Silent.—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; June 24 and June 27.)

X—The Man with X-Ray Eyes (1963)—Not as cut-and-dried as most low-budget science-fiction thrillers; some novel ideas help to sustain interest in this one, though eventually it goes the tired old moralizing route, and scientific "transgression" results in doom. A solemnly serious Ray Milland is Dr. Xavier, the scientist whose experiments result in the X-ray vision that torments him; Don Rickles helps to redeem the stereotyped role of the greedy carny man who exploits poor Xavier. Directed by Roger Corman.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; June 30 and July 2.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Films made in Hollywood between 1969 and 1975. June 19-20: "The Honeymoon Killers" (1970, Leonard Kastle) and "Sisters" (1973, Brian De Palma). . . . June 21-23: "California Split" (†). . . . June 24: "Where's Poppa?" (1970, Carl Reiner) and "Loving" (†). . . . June 25-26: "Badlands" (1973, Terrence Malick) and "Deliverance" (†). . . . June 27: "Taking Off" (1971, Milos Forman) and "Born to Win" (1971, Ivan Passer). . . . June 28-29: "Harold and Maude" (1971, Hal Ashby) and "Get to Know Your Rabbit" (1972, De Palma). . . . June 30-July 1: "Klute" (†) and "The Parallax View" (1974, Alan J. Pakula). . . . July 2: "Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia" (1974, Sam Peckinpah) and "Electra Glide in Blue" (1973, James William Guercio).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—June 20-22: A series of films starring Blanche Sweet. . . . ¶ Four silent films by Fritz Lang. June 22 at 5 and June 24 at 2:30: "The Spies" (1928). . . . June 23 at 2 and June 25 at 2:30: "Destiny" (1921). . . . June 23 at 5 and June 25 at 6: "Metropolis" (1926). . . . June 24 at 6 and June 27 at 2:30: "The Spiders" (†). . . . ¶ A showing of films from the museum's Martin Scorsese Collection. June 28 at 2:30: "Pursued" (1947, Raoul Walsh). . . . June 28 at 6: "Kiss Me Deadly" (1955, Robert Aldrich). . . . June 28 at 8 and July 1 at 2:30: "Wild River" (1960, Elia Kazan). . . . June 29 at 2 and July 1 at 6:

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"The Conversation" (1974, Francis Ford Coppola). . . . June 29 at 5 and July 2 at 6: "The Killer" (1989, John Woo). . . . June 30 at 1:30: "The Fall of the Roman Empire" (1964, Anthony Mann). . . . June 30 at 5 and July 2 at 2:30: "X—The Man with X-Ray Eyes" (†).

WALTER READE THEATRE, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—June 19-27: The Human Rights Watch International Film Festival. . . . ¶ June 27 at 6:30: "The High Road" (1996, Thomas Pallotta). . . . ¶ A program of French films based on French novels, plays, or short stories. June 28 at 2 and 6, June 29 at 4 and 8, and July 2 at 2 and 6:15: "Gigi" (†). . . . June 28 at 4:15 and 8:15 and June 29 at 6:15 and 10: "Poil de Carrotte" (†). . . . June 30 at 4 and 8:30 and July 1 at 2 and 6:15: "Thérèse Raquin" (1953, Marcel Carné). . . . June 30 at 6:15 and July 1 at 4:15 and 8:30: "Boule de Suif" (1945, Christian-Jaque). . . . July 2 at 4:15 and 8:30: "Jules and Jim" (1962, François Truffaut). . . . ¶ Weekend showings for children. June 29-30 at 2: "Kid from Brooklyn" (1946, Norman Z. McLeod).

SYMPHONY SPACE, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—June 25 at 7: "A Night at the Opera" (†). . . . June 25 at 8:45: "King of Hearts" (1967, Philippe de Broca; in French and English).

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—Two films written by Buck Henry. June 22 at 2: "The Graduate" (1967, Mike Nichols). . . . June 22 at 5:30: "To Die For" (1995, Gus Van Sant). . . . ¶ June 23 at 2: "Fingers" (†). . . . ¶ June 23 at 4:30: "Atlantic City" (1981, Louis Malle). . . . ¶ Films made in Hollywood by Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang. June 29 at 2: "Rancho Notorious" (1952, Lang). . . . June 29 at 4: "Marnie" (1964, Hitchcock). . . . June 30 at 2: "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt" (1956, Lang). . . . June 30 at 4: "The Wrong Man" (1956, Hitchcock).

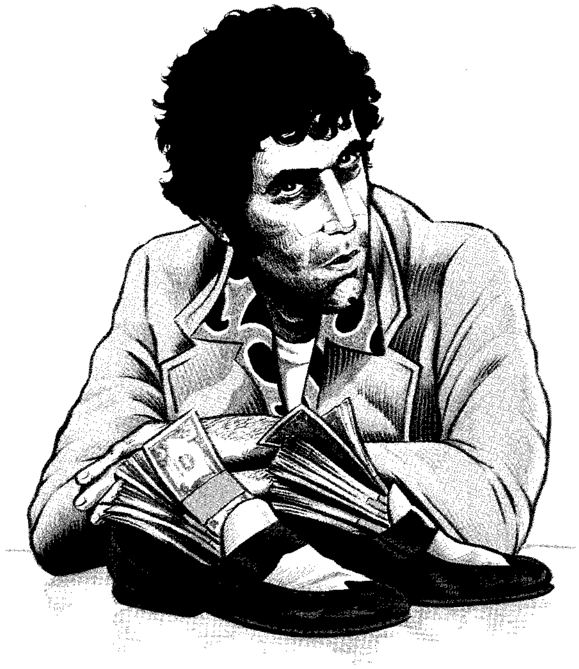
FLORENCE GOULD HALL, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—June 26 at 3 and 7: "Les Cahiers Retrouvés de Nina Vyroubova" (1996, Dominique Delouche; in French). . . . June 27 at 7: "Rendez-Vous in Paris" (1995, Eric Rohmer; in French). . . . July 2 at 12:30, 3:15, 6, and 8:45: "The Eternal Return" (†).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—A series of Italian films. June 21 at 8 and June 29 at 7: "City of Women" (†). . . . June 22 at 2: "Satyricon" (1969, Federico Fellini). . . . June 22 at 7:30: "8½" (1963, Fellini). . . . June 23 at 2: "Open City" (1945, Roberto Rossellini). . . . June 23 at 4: "L'Amore" (1948, Rossellini). . . . June 28 at 7:30 and June 30 at 7: "The Leopard" (1963, Luchino Visconti). . . . June 29 at 9: "Toby Dammit" (1968) and "Director's Notebook" (1969), both by Fellini. . . . June 30 at 2 and 4: "Chung Kuo" (1972, Michelangelo Antonioni).

BRYANT PARK, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.—Mondays, starting at dusk: free drive-in-style moviegoing, beginning with Looney Tunes, coming attractions, and newsreels. The feature on June 24 will be "Citizen Kane" (1941, Orson Welles); on July 1, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" (1939, Frank Capra). (Rain dates are the following nights.)

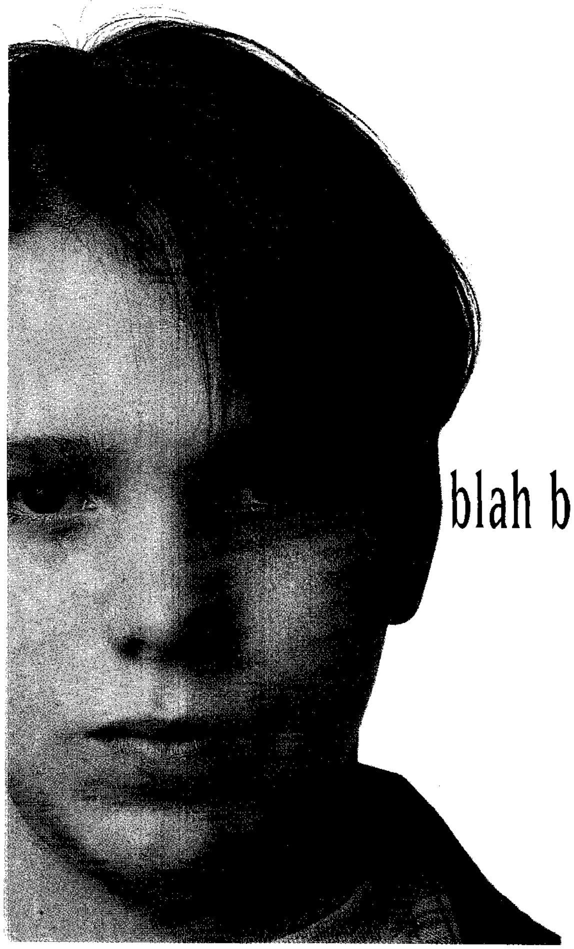
A DIFFERENT LIGHT BOOKSTORE, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films. On June 23 at 7, the feature will be "My Beautiful Laundrette" (1986, Stephen Frears); on June 30 at 7, "Pink Flamingos" (1972, John Waters).

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—A program of African films. June 19 at 3: "Guelwaar" (1990, Ousmane Sembène; Senegal). . . . June 19 at 6:30: "Camp de Thiaroye" (1987, Sembène; Senegal). . . . June 25 at 3 and June 26 at 6:30: "Night of Counting the Years" (1970, Chadi Adbel Salam; Egypt). . . . June 25 at 6:30 and June 26 at 3: "Mapantsula" (1988, Thomas Mogotiane and Oliver Schmitz; South Africa).



Elliott Gould in "California Split."

MARK ZINGARELLI



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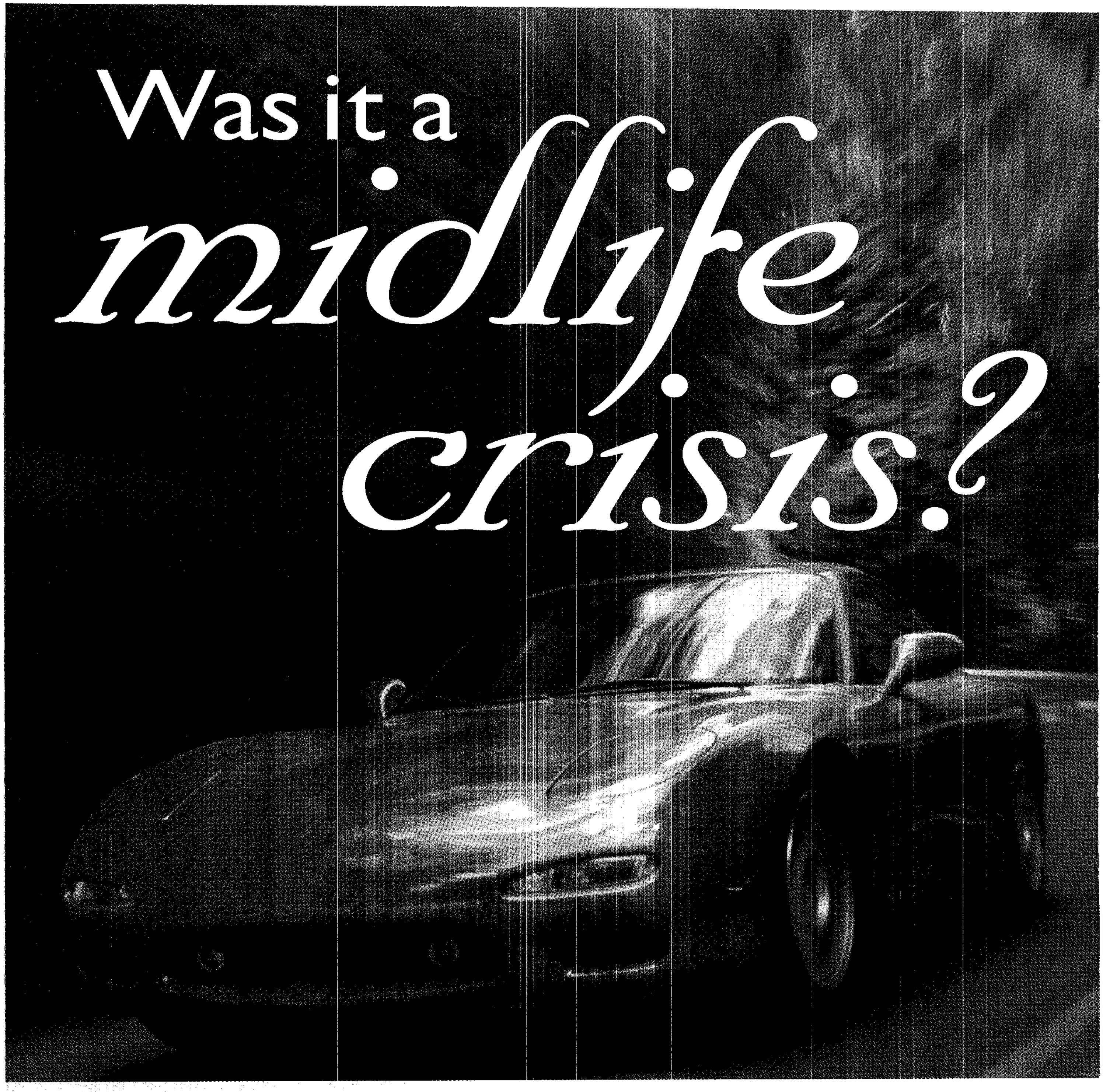
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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

FROM SID VICIOUS TO BOB DOLE

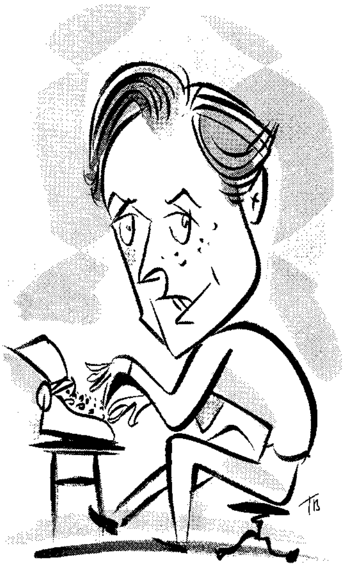
BILL CLINTON may be the Presidential candidate of the Ivy League, but his state-school-educated opponent Bob Dole is fast gaining the literary edge. Last month came the news that Dole's new eloquence owed a great deal to the novelist-cum-speechwriter Mark Helprin. Now comes the next chapter: for his campaign communications director, Dole has chosen a satiric novelist and former punk-rock critic for the *SoHo Weekly News*, John Buckley.

The thirty-nine-year-old scion of Connecticut's most famous conservative clan, who has his uncle Bill's blue eyes, deadpan wit, and libertarian right-of-center politics, acknowledges that his candidate could use a fictional boost. "Magic realism is absolutely what's needed in the Dole campaign," Buckley says. The candidate, he explains, "is a great American character." But, while Dole's gritty climb from the flat, dusty plains of Kansas through real wars, cold wars, and Washington ones, too, "fits the realism" needed for a gripping political plot, his campaign, Buckley admits, has been "perhaps a little unmagical."

In choosing Buckley, who broke with family tradition by eschewing Yale and majoring in fiction at worrisomely liberal Hampshire College, Dole has put in charge of his communications operation an apparatchik with a comic sensibility, who passes for hip in Washington. While serving as deputy press secretary in the 1984 Reagan-Bush campaign, Buckley began work on his first novel, "Family Politics," a thinly veiled spoof of his own political family; it was published in 1988. His second novel, "Statute of Limitations," a sendup of Washington's puritanical obsession with the personal foibles of public figures, came out in 1990. Neither book did quite well enough to encourage Buckley to give up his job, as senior vice-president for communications at the giant semi-governmental mortgage bank Fannie Mae. But, starting this summer, he will take a full leave, to oversee and coördinate the Dole campaign's speechwriting, press relations, and over-all "daily message."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

If Helprin's gift for mythic allegory was intended to add a richer timbre to Dole's prosaic voice, it seems probable that Buckley's talent for parody will also come in handy, but in a somewhat different facet of the campaign: carving up Clinton. Buckley pulls a chair up to a conference table in his spacious corner office in a Colonial-style building and suggests that the President has "done a masterful job of having an election-year conversion." He goes on, "What occurred between January, 1993, and November, 1994, has been erased from the American memory—you could do an 'X-Files' show on Clinton's record for those years."


John Buckley

BUCKLEY was not always enamored of Dole. In fact, in 1988, when he was working for Jack Kemp in the Republican Presidential primary, he did his best to undermine Dole, at one point following Newt Gingrich's lead in labelling him the "tax collector for the welfare state." Now he says, with a nervous grin, "Whatever I said about Dole in years past I chalk up to my reckless youth, and I sure hope he does, too."

Harder still to explain away is Buckley's 1992 Presidential vote. The rumor is that Dole's new communications director voted for Clinton—a rumor that Buckley declines to confirm or deny. "Mystery," he says, sounding like a novelist but acting like a flack, "is underrated, don't you think?"

While Buckley spins the Washington press corps with relative ease, he has had a tougher time at home. Since 1988, he has been married to Anna Bennett, a Democratic pollster who worked for Clinton in 1992 and whose current clients include Sally Thompson, a Democrat who is running for the seat of retiring Kansas senator Nancy Kassebaum. Buckley winces slightly when asked about how his decision to join Dole is sitting with his wife. "She's tolerating it" is about all he will say. In any case, Buckley says, he and Bennett have no intention of becoming this year's Carville and Matalin. "It's not right for campaign people to be stars," he adds.

To keep peace at home, Buckley says, he has promised his wife that, win or lose, he will, like Cincinnatus, return to his nonpartisan day job as soon as the campaign is over. But until then he is enjoying the perks of Presidential politics, not the least of which for a writer is, as he puts it, "the best excuse I've had in years not to have written that third novel."

POEM · GERTRUDE STEIN

As Alice B. Toklas typed out Gertrude Stein's notebooks each day, she often found love notes between the pages. Some of them—including the following, written around 1940—were turned over to Yale University Library, where they were rediscovered in 1981 and displayed for the first time last month.

Do you really think I would yes I would and
I do love all you with all me.
Do you really think I could, yes I could
yes I would love all you with all me.
Do you really think I should yes I should
love all you with all me yes I should
yes I could yes I would.
Do you really think I do love all you
with all me yes I do love all you with all
me And bless my baby.

GODZILLA MEETS INDIE ROCKERS

LAST fall, when Thomas Pynchon contributed liner notes to the rock group Lotion's album "Nobody's Cool," there was concern in the literary world that the reclusive author of "Gravity's Rainbow" had turned into a groupie. Disbelief congealed into dismay when Pynchon reappeared, in the June issue of *Esquire*, blithely chatting with the members of Lotion about Ecstasy and a toilet once used by Elvis Presley.

Encouraged by the author's unusual loquaciousness, reporters have done their best to lure the band into "outing" Pynchon. But the members of Lotion—Bill and Jim Ferguson, Rob Youngberg, and Tony Zajkowski—are looking after their special friend as if he were a weird uncle who won't come out of the attic.

"The word I'd use to describe him is 'goofy,'" Tony said recently at a diner near the band's studio, in the Flatiron District. The remark is met with disapproving glances. Tony is the singer, and thus is given to reckless opinions.

"He's not as well spoken as you might expect," adds Bill, the bassist and chief cerebral.

"He makes a lot of faces," says Jim, the guitarist.

"Everything about him is just so casual," explains Rob, the drummer.

The writer and the rockers first met in Cincinnati. Lotion was on its first tour, playing a club that doubles as a laundromat. "Halfway through the set, this older guy comes in and sets himself near the stage," Bill says.

"We would have preferred a bunch of indie-rock girls," Tony says. After the show, the older guy, who was wearing a Godzilla shirt and ill-fitting pants, swung by to offer his compliments. He introduced himself as Tom. A few months later, Lotion was getting ready to play a New York rock club when Tom reappeared from the audience. "It was like 'Hey, Godzilla's here,'" Tony says.

"I thought he was one of Rob's parents' friends," Jim confesses.

What followed is a happenstance of such exquisite improbability that it verges on the metaphysical. It seems that Jim was reading "Slow Learner," Pynchon's collection of short stories. He'd left his copy backstage, where Pynchon had been invited to watch the show. Pynchon saw it and asked, "Who's reading my book?"

"I said, 'No, that's my book,'" Jim recalls. "It didn't register until I got onstage."

Later, Jim told the rest of the band about his discovery. "I didn't even know who he was," Tony says. After that, Tom began to show up at Lotion performances all over the country. An unlikely friendship was born.

A year later, the members of Lotion are still a bit stunned by their guardian angel. "To this day, we're still not sure if he really is Thomas Pynchon," Rob says.

"For all we know, he might be J. D. Salinger," Jim adds.

"He does seem to know everything about everything, though," Bill says.

"Every time we have lunch and he picks up the tab, he pays in cash," Tony says. "I'm dying to see the Amex card. You know—Thomas Pynchon, card member since 1978."

DEM POETS

IT is unlikely that Dennis Nurkse will ever write a poem about "the gladness of the river" that separates Brooklyn from Manhattan, as Walt Whitman did. Or that he'll praise the "choiring strings" of the Brooklyn Bridge, as Hart Crane did. Or that, like Marianne Moore, he'll pen a paean to the Brooklyn Dodgers ("in a strikeout slaughter when what could matter more, / he lines a homer to the signboard and has changed the score"). As Nurkse admits with a soft laugh, "American cities aren't necessarily pleasant places in my work." Nevertheless, Nurkse beat out thirty-eight other candidates to become the new Poet Laureate of Brooklyn.

Not that he was exactly dying for the position: prior to his appointment, he had described the job as "a bit of an oxymoron—I think of poetry as an art form that does not depend on hierarchies." Still, the day Borough President Howard Golden informed Nurkse that he had been chosen ("I don't profess to be an expert in the field," Golden admits, "but I'm a very strong person in terms of my understanding of what I want"), the forty-six-year-old poet was feeling pretty good.

Brooklyn's new Poet Laureate was born in Manhattan, the child of European refugees from Hitler. "I've been writing poetry ever since I was five," says Nurkse, a gentle man with a curly beard who is dressed in bluejeans and black sneakers, as he sits on a bench near Prospect Park. "It was always in my house—Eliot, Pushkin. I can remember thinking that when my parents died I wouldn't have a lot of material. Then my father died when I was eight, so it was sooner than I had thought."

The material kept coming, though. Nurkse—who quotes Patrick Ewing,

I have seen the longest of winters. I have seen compassion conquer despair.
I have seen that hope is a flame that can't be extinguished. I would like to see my children.

-Diane Paul, Red Cross Overseas Refugee Relief.

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W. B. Yeats, and the Torah in the course of a discussion—has published four books of poetry, and his work has appeared in scores of literary magazines. His ideas, he says, come "from daily life, from common speech, from dreams, from horrible things that have happened to me, from the comics in the paper." Again and again, though, he returns, in language that is both blunt and elegiac, to the dream of love ("the music begins to play us") and the nightmare of its dissolution ("all lost things are preserved/as accusations").

Having frequently taught poetry to children, Nurkse calls the notion that today's kids are lacking in language skills "ridiculous." He says, "The first line one kid came up with was 'A blackbird trapped among doves longs for a darker day.' You can't explain what poetry is, but that's definitely poetry."

Nurkse's only predecessor, Norman Rosten, remained Poet Laureate from 1979 until his death, last year. (Golden particularly remembers one Rosten poem, entitled "Glad Words for Howard.") And while only Brooklyn has a Poet Laureate, the Borough President suggests that every borough deserves one. "It would be wonderful to have a tournament," he says.

Nurkse doesn't seem like a tournament sort of guy. But can we at least expect an ode or two to Brooklyn? "I kind of think absolutely not," he says. "As far as topics or themes, it's going to be as art wants to be—which is without any preconception."

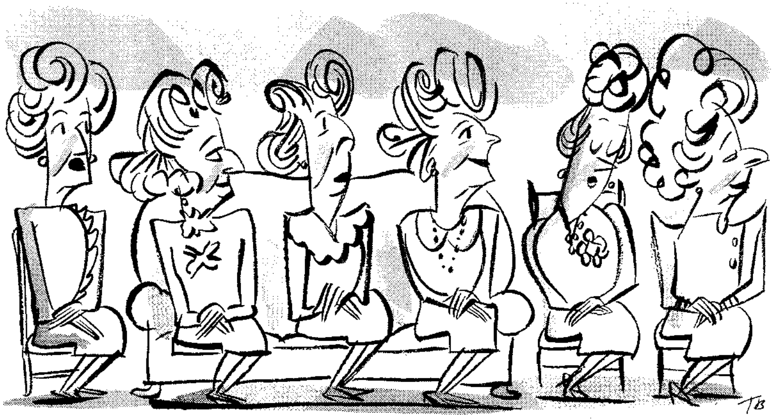
LADIES OF THE CLUB

THERE is no such thing as being fashionably late for the biweekly meeting of the Nineteenth Century Club. By three minutes of three on a recent Wednesday, all the members of the ladies' literary group had arrived at Mrs. Charles Clayton, Jr.,'s opulent Tudor-style house in a Birmingham, Alabama, suburb, and had seated themselves in the parlor. There were flowers on the mantel and the sideboards, and the silver and crystal had been buffed to a blinding sheen. Even this display, though, was considered subdued. "Some hostesses have been known to get their houses painted," one club member said.

A Birmingham woman may belong to several of the city's informal reading groups, but she may hold membership in just one of the big four: the Nineteenth Century, the Cadmean Circle, the New Era Study Club, and the Highland Book Club. These clubs, three of which are more than a hundred years old, are a cross between the Algonquin Round Table and the Junior League. Although their membership once included the South's leading suffragists and child-labor reformers, today they are decidedly less progressive. "We believe that change for the sake of change is deplorable," a Nineteenth Century member said dryly. "And we believe that change for a reason is also deplorable."

Each club has about thirty members—roughly "a parlor's worth"—and places are coveted. Members are nominated and elected according to an elaborate and occasionally traumatic system, and, once they have been accepted, attendance is mandatory. While most meetings are lively, some move at a more lackadaisical pace, and the challenge becomes simply staying awake. "You just try not to fall over," one elderly woman reflected.

At Mrs. Clayton's house, the meeting began when a chestnut gavel was displayed, but not banged. After roll call (members answer "present," because "here" is considered indelicate), it was time for a lecture. Mrs. William Featheringill, a law professor at a local university, stood before the women of the Nineteenth Century—primly sitting in their chairs, hands folded, well-maintained hairdos looking like a garden of silver topiaries—and began an account of the Trail of Tears: the relocation, by white Southerners, of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia to Oklahoma. When she'd finished detailing the horrors committed by the whites, one dismayed member offhandedly announced, "Why, we almost deserved the Yankees coming down here and whipping us." The ensuing silence was apocalyptic. A woman looked up from her needlepoint with a blistering, I-do-declare! gaze, and another spoke in defense of Andrew Jackson, the President who supported the relocation of Native Americans. "Now remember, there are two sides to every story," she warbled. A tense dialogue followed but was soon quelled by the prevailing sense of decorum. And, before long, it was time for tea.



THE ladies stood in unison and made their way to Mrs. Clayton's dining-room table. A younger member offered tea from a formal silver service. The women sipped from china cups, ate cucumber sandwiches, and recounted the story about the absent-minded elderly member who read the same page of her lecture three times before anyone dared suggest that she sit down. And there was talk of the lecture on Victorian mores by a member who repeatedly referred to the problem of "wo-rees" in London. When someone finally asked her to define the word "wo-ree," the woman revealed that the word was actually "whores"; she had never heard it spoken. It was cocktail hour as the meeting came to an end, and there was some lament that drinking hard liquor was out of favor these days. As the women filed out, one of them wistfully recalled a late member who made a "bourbon slush that would knock your head off." ♦

"From Sid Vicious to Bob Dole," Jane Mayer; "Godzilla Meets Indie Rockers," Andrew Essex; "Dem Poets," Susie Linfield; "Ladies of the Club," Warren St. John.

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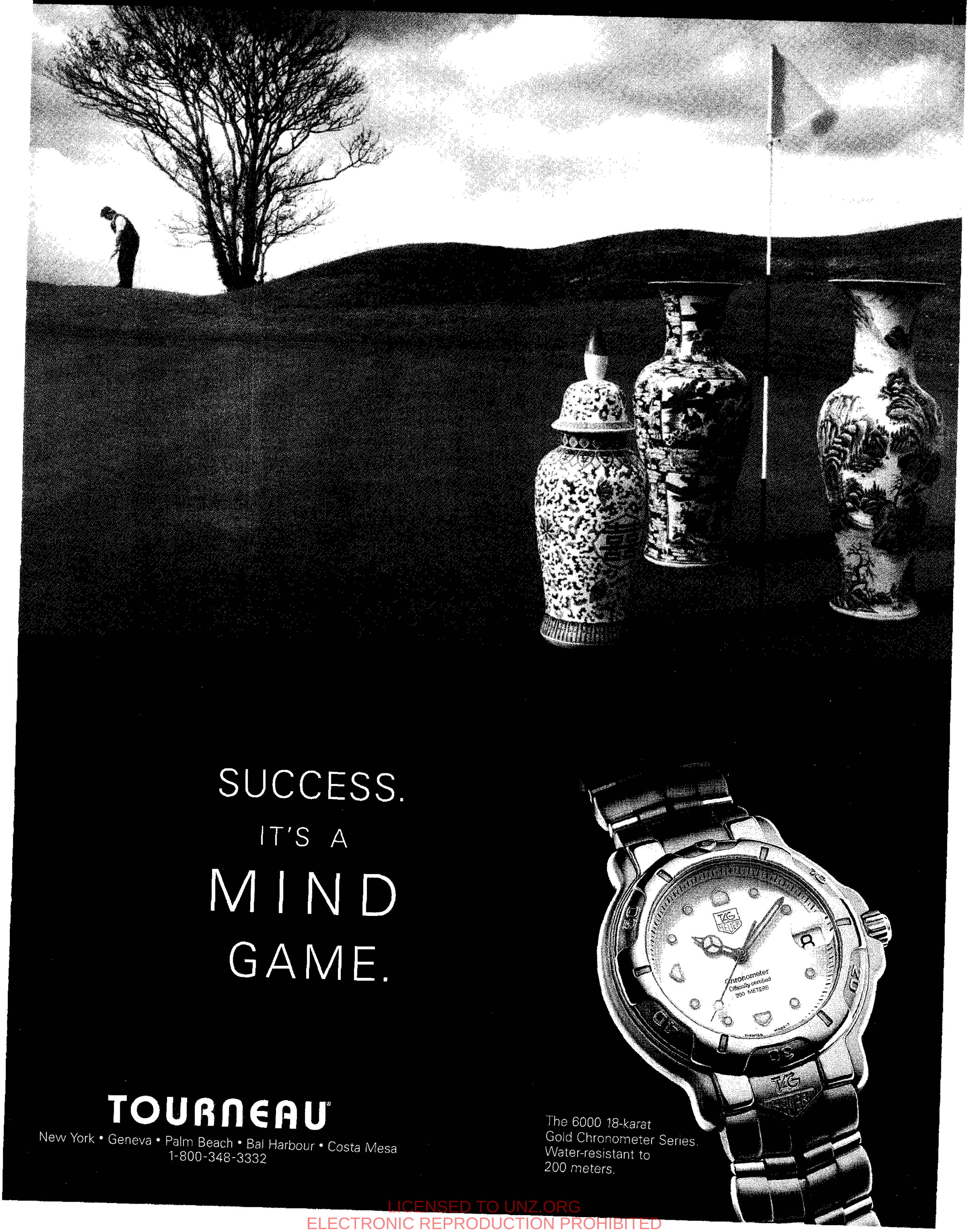

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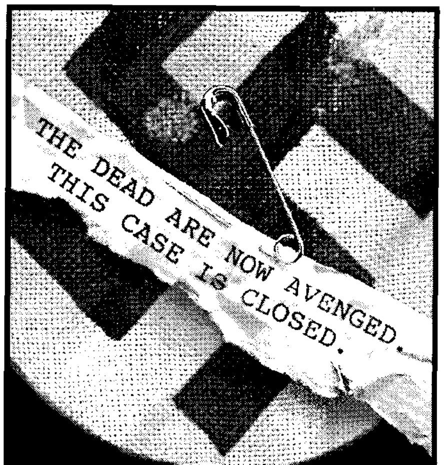

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

IN DEFENSE OF THE NOVEL, YET AGAIN

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BY SALMAN RUSHDIE

FILIP PAGOWSKI

At the centenary conference of the British Publishers' Association, Professor George Steiner said a mouthful:

> We are getting very tired in our novels. . . . Genres rise, genres fall, the epic, the verse epic, the formal verse tragedy—great moments, then they ebb. Novels will continue to be written for quite a while but, increasingly, the search is on for hybrid forms, what we will call rather crassly fact/fiction. . . . What novel can today quite compete with the best of reportage, with the very best of immediate narrative? . . .
>
> Pindar [was] the first man on record to say, This poem will be sung when the city which commissioned it has ceased to exist. Literature's immense boast against death. To say this today even the greatest poet, I dare venture, would be profoundly embarrassed. . . .
>
> The great classical vainglory (but what a wonderful vainglory) of literature—"I am stronger than death. I can speak about death in poetry, drama, the novel, because I have overcome it, because I am more or less permanent. . . ." That is no longer available.

So here it is once more, wrapped up in the finest, shiniest rhetoric: I mean, of course, that tasty old chestnut the Death of the Novel. To which Professor Steiner adds, for good measure, the Death (or, at least, the radical transformation into some sort of computer whiz kid, some sort of supernerd) of the Reader, and the Death (or, at least, the radical transformation into electronic form) of the Book itself. The Death of the Author having been announced several years ago in France (and the Death of Tragedy by Professor Steiner himself, in an earlier obituary), that leaves the stage strewn with more bodies than the end of "Hamlet."

Still standing in the midst of the carnage, however, is a lone, commanding figure, a veritable Fortinbras, before whom all of us, writers of authorless texts, postliterate readers, the House of Usher that is the publishing industry—the Denmark, with something rotten in it, that is the publishing industry—and, indeed, books themselves must bow our heads; viz., naturally, the Critic.

One great writer, at least, has also in recent weeks announced the demise of the form of which he has been so celebrated a practitioner. V. S. Naipaul has not only ceased to write novels but the word "novel" itself, he tells us, now makes him feel ill. Like Professor Steiner, the author of "A House for Mr. Biswas" feels that the novel has outlived its historical moment, no longer fulfills any useful role, and will be replaced by factual writing. Sir Vidia Naipaul, it will surprise no one to learn, is currently to be found at the leading edge of history, creating this new postfictional literature.

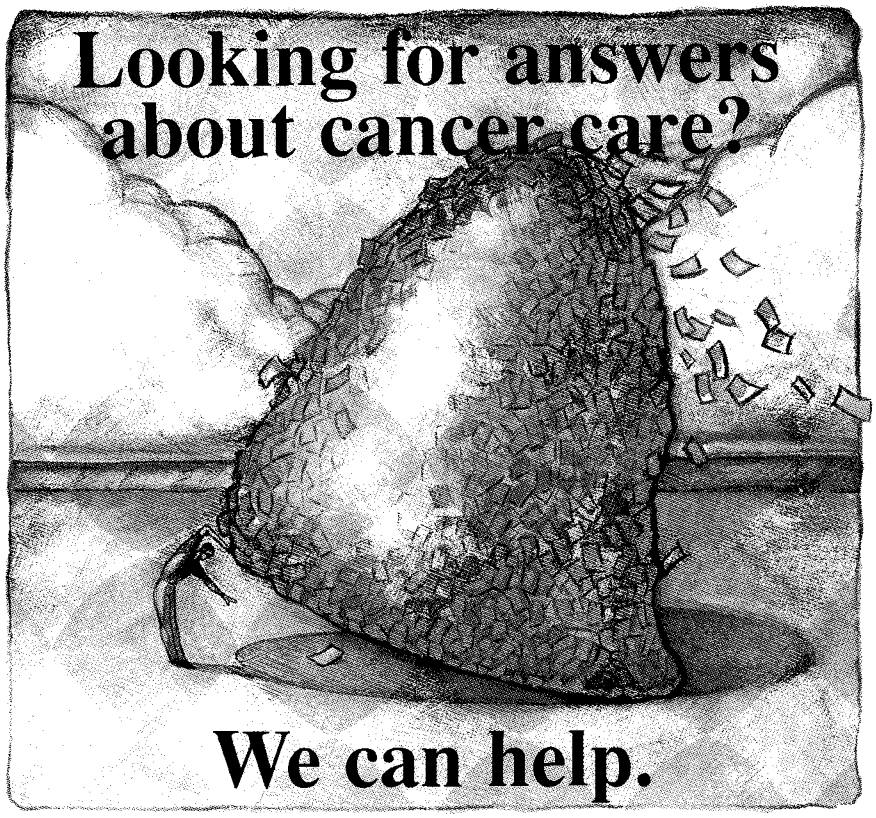
Another major British writer has this to say: "It hardly needs pointing out that at this moment the prestige of the novel is extremely low, so low that the words 'I never read novels,' which even a dozen years ago were generally uttered with a hint of apology, are now *always* uttered in a tone of conscious pride. . . . It is much likelier, if the best literary brains cannot be induced to return to it, to survive in some perfunctory, despised, and hopelessly degenerate form, like modern tombstones, or the Punch and Judy show."

That was George Orwell, writing in 1936. It appears—and Professor Steiner concedes—that literature has perhaps never had a future. (Even the Iliad and the Odyssey received bad early reviews.) Good writing has always been attacked, most notably by other good writers. The most cursory glance at literary history reveals that no literary masterpiece has been safe from assault at the time of its publication, no writer's reputation unassailed by his contemporaries: Aristophanes called Euripides a "cliché anthologist . . . and maker of ragamuffin mannikins"; Samuel Pepys thought "A Midsummer Night's Dream" "insipid and ridiculous"; Charlotte Brontë dismissed the work of Jane Austen; Zola pooh-poohed "Les Fleurs du Mal"; Henry James trashed "Middlemarch" and "Our Mutual Friend." Everybody sneered at "Moby-Dick." *Le Figaro* announced when "Madame Bovary" was published, "Monsieur Flaubert is not a writer"; Virginia Woolf called "Ulysses" "underbred"; and the reviewer for the Odessa *Courier* wrote of "Anna Karenina," "Sentimental rubbish. . . . Show me one page that contains an idea."

So when today's German critics attack Günter Grass, when today's Italian literati are "surprised," as the French novelist and critic Guy Scarpetta tells us, to learn of Italo Calvino's and Leonardo Sciascia's high international reputations, when the cannons of American political correctness are turned on Saul Bellow, when Anthony Burgess belittles Graham Greene moments after Greene's death, and when Professor Steiner—ambitious, as ever—takes on not just a few individual writers but the whole literary output of postwar Europe, they may all be suffering from culturally endemic golden-ageism: that recurring, bilious nostalgia for a literary past that at the time didn't seem much better than the present does now.

Professor Steiner says, "It is almost axiomatic that today the great novels are coming from the far rim, from India, from the Caribbean, from Latin America," and some will find it surprising that I take issue with this vision of an exhausted center and a vital periphery. Yet I do so, in part, because this is such a very Eurocentric lament. Only a Western European intellectual would compose a lament for an entire art form on the basis that the literatures of, say, England, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy were no longer the most interesting on earth. It is unclear whether Professor Steiner considers the United States to be in the center or on the far rim; the geography of this flat-earther vision of literature is a little hard to follow. From where I sit, though, the literature of the United States looks to be in good shape.

What does it matter where the great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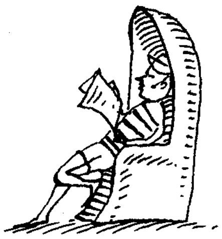
novels come from, as long as they keep coming? What is this flat earth on which the good Professor lives, with jaded Romans at the center and frightfully gifted Hottentots and anthropophagi lurking at the edges? The map in Professor Steiner's head is an imperial map, and Europe's empires are long gone. The half century whose literary output Steiner and Naipaul take as proof of the novel's decline is also the first half century of the postcolonial period. Might it not be simply that a new novel is emerging—a postcolonial novel, a decentered, transnational, interlingual, cross-cultural novel—and that in this new world order, or disorder, we find a better explanation of the contemporary novel's health than Professor Steiner's somewhat patronizingly Hegelian view that the reason for the creativity of the "far rim" is that these are areas "which are in an earlier stage of the bourgeois culture, which are in an earlier, rougher, more problematic form"?

It was, after all, the Franco regime's success in stifling decade after decade of Spanish literature that shifted the spotlight to the fine writers working in Latin America. Accordingly, the so-called Latin-American Boom was as much the result of the corruption of the old bourgeois world as it was of the supposedly primitive creativity of the new. And the description of India's ancient and sophisticated culture as existing in an "earlier, rougher" state than that of the West is manifestly inaccurate. India, with its great mercantile classes, its sprawling bureaucracies, its exploding economy, possesses one of the largest and most dynamic bourgeoisies in the world, and has done so for at least as long as Europe has. Great literature and a class of literate readers are nothing new in India. What is new is the emergence of a gifted generation of Indian writers *working in English*. What is new is that the "center" has deigned to notice the "rim" because the "rim" has begun to speak in its myriad versions of a language the West can more easily understand.



Even Professor Steiner's portrait of an exhausted Europe is, in my opinion, simply and demonstrably false. The past fifty years have given us the œuvres of—to name just a few—Albert Camus, Graham Greene, Doris Lessing, Samuel Beckett, Italo Calvino, Elsa Morante, Vladimir Nabokov, Günter Grass, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Milan Kundera, Danilo Kiš, Thomas Bernhard, and Marguerite Yourcenar. We can all make our own lists. If we include writers from beyond the frontiers of Europe, it becomes clear that the world has rarely seen so rich a crop of fine novelists living and working at the same time. It becomes clear, too, that the easy gloom of the Steiner-Naipaul position is not only depressing but unjustified. If V. S. Naipaul no longer wishes or is no longer able to write novels, it is our loss. But the art of the novel will undoubtedly survive without him.

In my view, there is no crisis in the art of the novel. The novel is precisely that "hybrid form" for which Professor Steiner yearns: it is part social inquiry, part fantasy, part confessional; it crosses frontiers of knowledge as well as topographical boundaries. The Professor is right, however, in saying that many good writers have blurred the boundaries between fact and fiction. Ryszard Kapuściński's magnificent book about Haile Selassie, "The Emperor," is just one example of this creative blurring. The so-called New Journalism developed in America by Tom Wolfe and others was a straightforward attempt to steal the novel's clothes, and, in the case of Wolfe's own "Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak-Catchers" or "The Right Stuff," the attempt was persuasively successful. The category of "travel writing" has expanded to include works of profound cultural meditation—Claudio Magris's "Danube," say, or Neal Ascherson's "Black Sea." And in the face of a brilliant nonfictional tour de force such as Roberto Calasso's "The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony," in which a reëxamination of the Greek myths achieves all the tension and intellectual excitement of the best fiction, one can only applaud the arrival of a new kind of imaginative essay writing—or, better, the return of the encyclopedic playfulness of Diderot or Montaigne. The novel can welcome these developments without feeling threatened. There's room for all of us in here.

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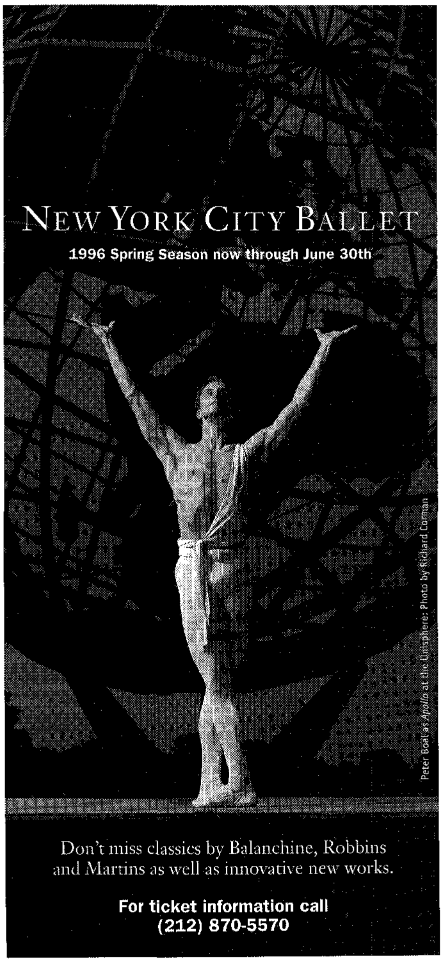

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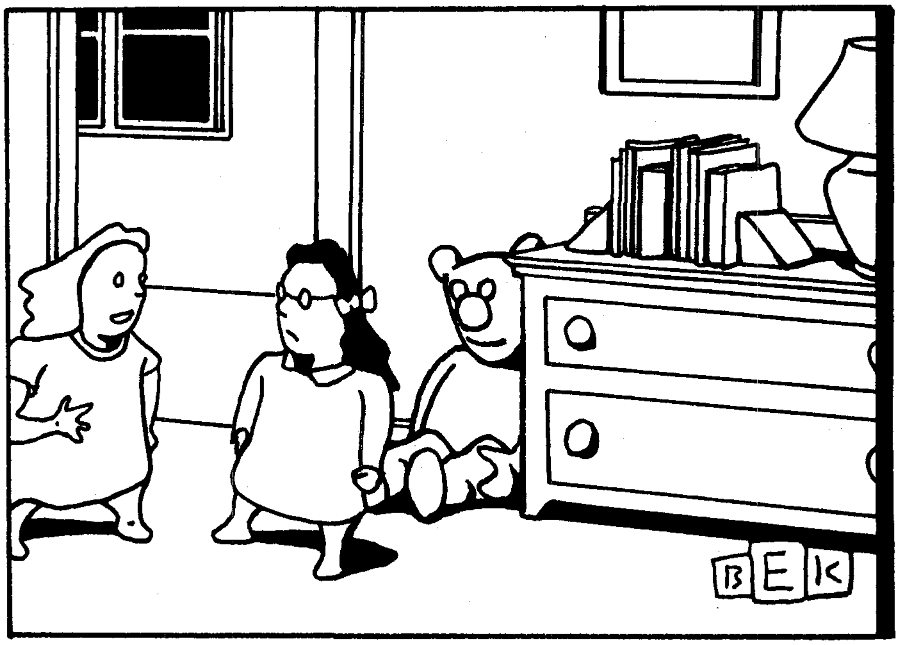


“Call me shallow—I like ‘Goodnight Moon.’ ”

* * *

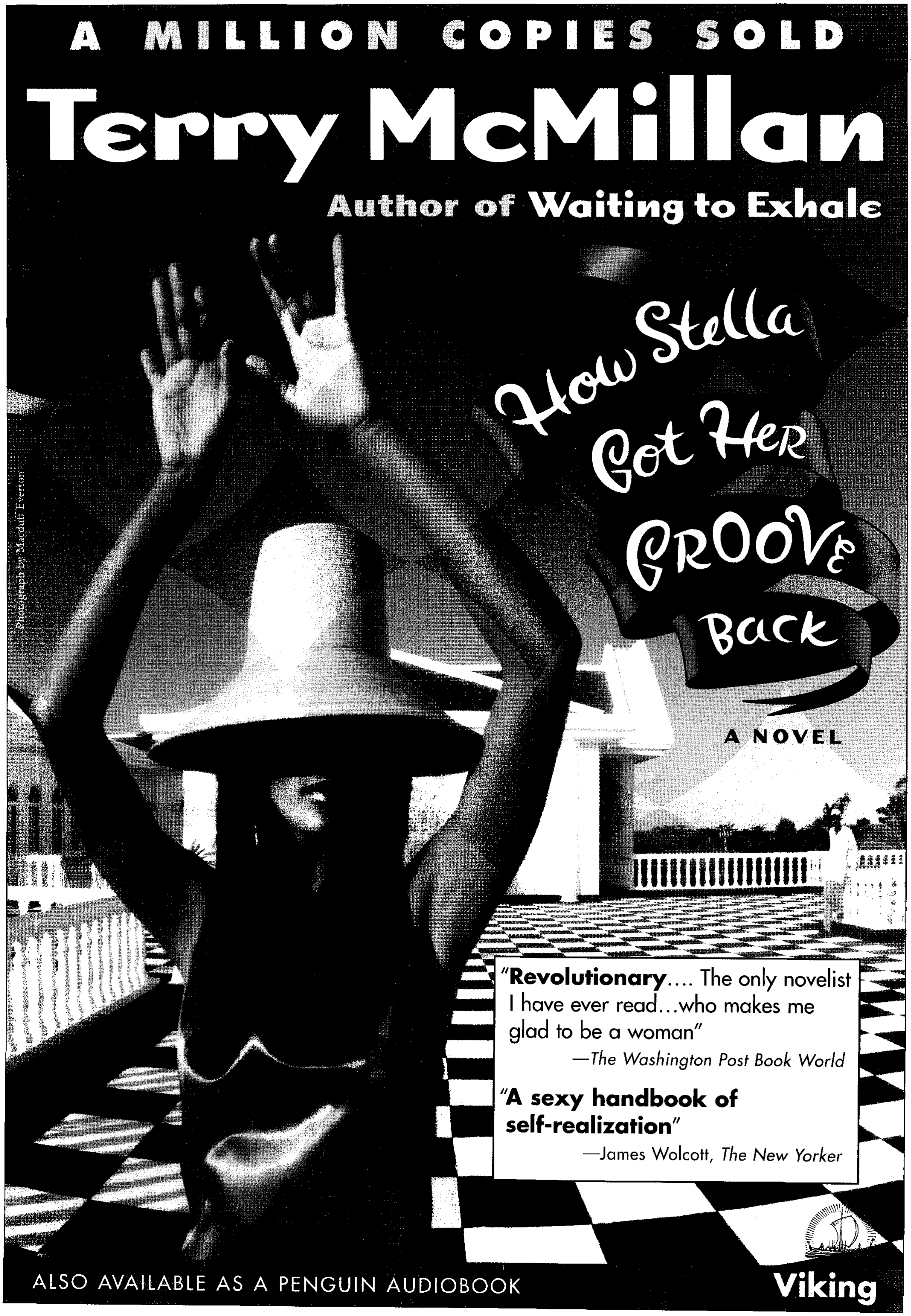
Will Self published a funny short story called “The Quantity Theory of Insanity,” which suggested that the sum total of sanity available to the human race might be fixed—a constant, in other words—and any attempt to cure the insane was useless, since the effect of one individual's regaining his sanity would inevitably be that someone somewhere else lost his, as if we were all sleeping in a bed under a blanket—of sanity—that wasn't quite big enough to cover us all: one of us pulls the blanket toward him and another's toes are instantly exposed. It is a richly comic idea, and it recurs in Professor Steiner's zaniest argument—which he offers with a perfectly straight face—that at any given moment there exists a total quantum of creative talent, and at present the lure of the cinema, of television, and even of advertising copywriting is pulling the blanket of genius away from the novel, which consequently lies exposed, shivering in its pajamas, in the depths of our cultural winter.

The trouble with this theory is that it supposes all creative talent to be of the same kind. Apply this notion to athletics and its absurdity becomes apparent. The supply of marathon runners is not diminished by the popularity of sprint events. The quality of high jumpers is unrelated to the number of exponents of the pole vault.

It is more likely that the advent of new art forms allows new groups of people to enter the creative arena. I know of very few great filmmakers who might have been good novelists—Satyajit Ray, Ingmar Bergman, Woody Allen, Jean Renoir, and that's about it. How many pages of Quentin Tarantino's snappy material, his gangsters' riffs about eating Big Macs in Paris, could you read if you didn't have Samuel L. Jackson or John Travolta speaking them for you? The best screenwriters are the best precisely because they think not novelistically but pictorially.

I am, in short, much less worried than Professor Steiner about the threat these newer, high-tech forms pose to the novel. It is perhaps the low-tech nature of the act of writing that will save it. Means of artistic expression that require large quantities of finance and sophisticated technology—films, plays, records—become, by virtue of that dependence, easy to censor and to control. But what one writer can make in the solitude of one room is something no power can easily destroy.

Professor Steiner's celebration of the creativity of modern science—“Today that is where the joy is, that is where the hope is, the energy, the formidable sense of world upon world opening up”—is a celebration with which I deeply agree: it is the final disproof of his “quantity theory of creativity.” The idea that poten-



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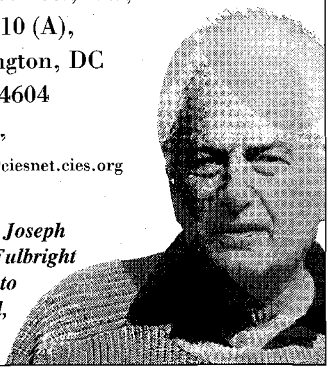

Novelist Joseph Heller, Fulbright Scholar to England, 1949

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tial illustrious novelists have been lost to the study of subatomic physics or black holes is as implausible as its opposite: that the great writers of history—Jane Austen, say, or James Joyce—might easily, had they but taken a different turning, have been the Newtons and Einsteins of their day. In questioning the quality of creativity to be found in the modern novel, Professor Steiner points us in the wrong direction. If there is a crisis in present-day literature, it is of a somewhat different kind.

The novelist Paul Auster recently told me that the inescapable fact all American writers had to accept was that they were involved in an activity that in the United States was no more than a minority interest—like, say, soccer. This observation chimes with Milan Kundera's complaint, in "Testaments Betrayed," his recent volume of essays, of "Europe's incapacity to defend and explain (explain patiently to itself and to others) that most European of arts, the art of the novel; in other words, to explain and defend its own culture." Kundera argues, "The 'children of the novel' have abandoned the art that shaped them. Europe, the society of the novel, has abandoned its own self."

Auster is talking about the death of the American reader's interest in this kind of reading matter, Kundera about the death of the European reader's sense of cultural connection with this kind of cultural product. Add these to Steiner's illiterate, computer-obsessed child of tomorrow and perhaps we are talking about something like the death of reading itself.

Or perhaps not. For literature—good literature—has always been a minority interest. Its cultural importance derives not from its success in some sort of ratings war but from its success in telling us things about ourselves that we hear from no other quarter. And this minority—the minority that is prepared to read and buy good books—has in truth never been larger than it is now. The problem is to interest it.

What is happening is not so much the death as the bewilderment of the reader. In America last year, more than five thousand new novels were published. Five thousand! It would be a miracle if five hundred publishable novels had been written in a year. It would be extraordinary if fifty of them were good. It would be cause for universal celebration if five of them—if one of them—were great.

Publishers are overpublishing because in house after house good editors have been fired or not replaced, and an obsession with turnover has displaced the ability to distinguish good books from bad. Let the market decide, too many publishers seem to be saying. Let's just put this stuff out there. Something's bound to click. So out to the stores the books go: into the valley of death go the five thousand, with publicity machines providing inadequate covering fire. This approach is fabulously self-destructive. As Orwell said in 1936 (you see that there is nothing new under the sun), "the novel is being shouted out of existence." Readers, finding themselves unable to hack their way through the rain forest of junk fiction and made cynical by the debased language of hyperbole with which every book is garlanded, give up. They buy a couple of prizewinners a year, perhaps one or two books by writers whose names they recognize, and flee. Overpublishing and overhyping create underreading. It is not just a question of too many novels chasing too few readers but a question of too many novels actually chasing readers away. If publishing a first novel has become, as Professor Steiner suggests, "a gamble against reality," it is in large part because of this nondiscriminatory, scattergun approach. We hear a lot these days about a new, businesslike spirit of financial ruthlessness in publishing. What we need, however, is the best kind of editorial ruthlessness. We need a return to judgment.

THERE is another real danger facing literature, and of this Professor Steiner makes no mention; that is, the attack on intellectual liberty itself—intellectual liberty, without which there can be no literature. This is not a new danger, either. Once again, George Orwell, this time writing in 1945, offers us much remarkably contemporary wisdom:

> In our age, the idea of intellectual liberty is under attack from two directions. On the one side are its theoretical enemies, the apologists of totalitarianism [today one might say fanaticism] and on the other its immediate practical enemies, monopoly and bureaucracy. . . .
>
> In the past . . . the idea of rebellion and the idea of intellectual integrity were mixed

> up. A heretic—political, moral, religious, or aesthetic—was one who refused to outrage his own conscience. . . .
>
> [Nowadays the] dangerous proposition [is] that freedom is undesirable and that intellectual honesty is a form of anti-social selfishness.
>
> The enemies of intellectual liberty always try to present their case as a plea for discipline versus individualism. . . . The writer who refuses to sell his opinions is always branded as a mere egoist. He is accused, that is, either of wanting to shut himself up in an ivory tower, or of making an exhibitionist display of his own personality, or of resisting the inevitable current of history in an attempt to cling to unjustified privileges.
>
> [But] to write in plain, vigorous language one has to think fearlessly, and if one thinks fearlessly one cannot be politically orthodox.

The pressures of monopoly and bureaucracy, of corporatism and conservatism, limiting and narrowing the range and quality of what gets published, are known to every working writer. Of the pressures of intolerance and censorship, I have personally, in these past years, gained perhaps too much knowledge.

There are many such struggles taking place in the world today: in Algeria, in China, in Iran, in Turkey, in Egypt, in Nigeria, writers are being censored, harassed, jailed, and even murdered. The death of the novel may be far off, but the violent death of many contemporary novelists is, alas, an inescapable fact. In Europe and the United States as well, the storm troopers of various "sensitivities" seek to limit our freedom of speech. It has never been more important to continue to defend those values which make the art of literature possible.

In spite of this, I do not believe that writers have given up on posterity. What George Steiner beautifully calls the "wonderful vainglory" of literature still fires us, even if, as he suggests, we are too embarrassed to say so in public. The poet Ovid sets these great, confident lines at the end of his "Metamorphoses":

> But, with the better part of me, I'll
> gain
> a place that's higher than the stars:
> my name,
> indelible, eternal, will remain.

I am sure that the same ambition still resides in every writer's heart—to be thought of, in times to come, as Rilke thought of Orpheus:

> He is one of the staying messengers,
> who still holds far into the doors of
> the dead
> bowls with fruits worthy of praise. ♦

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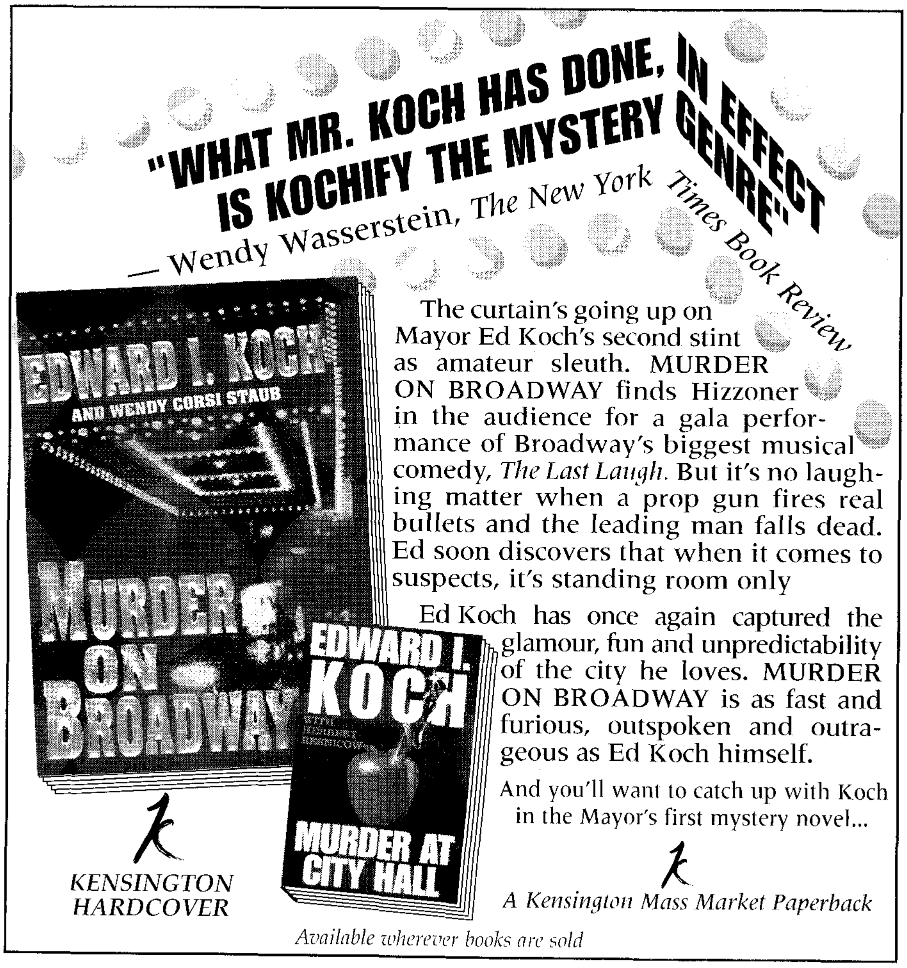

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PERSONAL HISTORY

NERUDA AND BORGES

No two Latin-American writers could be more important. No two writers could be more different. How did the author become the friend and translator of both?

BY ALASTAIR REID

WHEN I first went to Spain, in 1953, I knew little about the living country and barely a word of the language. But my senses were in good working order, and I was instantly drawn in by Spain's rhythms and its landscapes—the burned, sun-stained earth, the silver-blue clarity of Mediterranean light, the warm solemnity of the people, the spareness of village life. Existence was honed down to its essentials, making the days longer, time more abundant. So I returned to Spain, and returned, and eventually went to live there in 1956, setting out to learn the country, and slowly absorb the Spanish sense of time. Spaniards have a gift for expanding the present, around a meal or a conversation; and they are masters of the cosmic shrug that sheds all preoccupations except those immediately at hand. But living in Spain meant, above all, entering the Spanish language, for in those early days I felt separated from the spoken life around me, a bafflement hard to bear. Spanish, at first encounter, is welcoming: you enter it by way of the market and the kitchen, but you soon find yourself stranded on that plateau of daily needs. The language lies still beyond. Living in another language means growing another self, and it takes time for that other self to become a familiar. While I went about learning the machinery and the music, I realized at the same time that the Spanish I was acquiring was as devoid of context as that of a young child, for I had no past in the language. I was lucky, however, in having wise friends, and, following their counsel, I entered a continuum of reading and listening.

There is nothing like immersion in an unknown—new places, new landscapes, new preoccupations, new loves, a new language—to sharpen the edge of attention. From Majorca, where I first landed, I moved to Madrid and then to Barcelona. I travelled all over—to the Basque country, to Andalusia, to Gibraltar and Morocco, to Portugal—looking and listening a lot, and I wrote the first of a series of chronicles on Spain for *The New Yorker*. Soon after it appeared, I had my Spanish press credentials withdrawn, but that made little difference, for Spain existed then on rumor and speculation. Living there felt like belonging to an extensive whispered conspiracy against the Franco regime. Spain was at something of a standstill, still in shock from the Civil War and the long isolation that followed it, threadbare compared to the rest of Europe. Censorship, both moral and political, hung heavy over the press, over the universities, and over writers and publishers, and the police had sharp antennae out for any sign of dissidence. The writers I knew complained that years of censorship had instilled in Spaniards the habit of censoring themselves. Newspapers were gray and evasive, written opinion was sparse and guarded, and literature was thin and spare.

Among my friends in Barcelona was a young poet and publisher named Carlos Barral, lean, birdlike, throaty-voiced, and given to infectious enthusiasms. Carlos's imprint, Seix Barral, published the work of new Spanish writers and of European writers in translation, and consequently was always battling the censor. Carlos's enthusiasm at that time, however, was for the writing that was beginning to appear from the countries of Spanish America. In 1962, he published Mario Vargas Llosa's novel "La Ciudad y los Perros," later translated as "The Time of the Hero." The book was received in Spain with an excitement hardly ever generated by the Spanish novels of the day, and it led Carlos to proclaim, with remarkable prescience, that it was from the countries of Spanish America that we should expect not just the next literary flowering but the renewing of the Spanish language.

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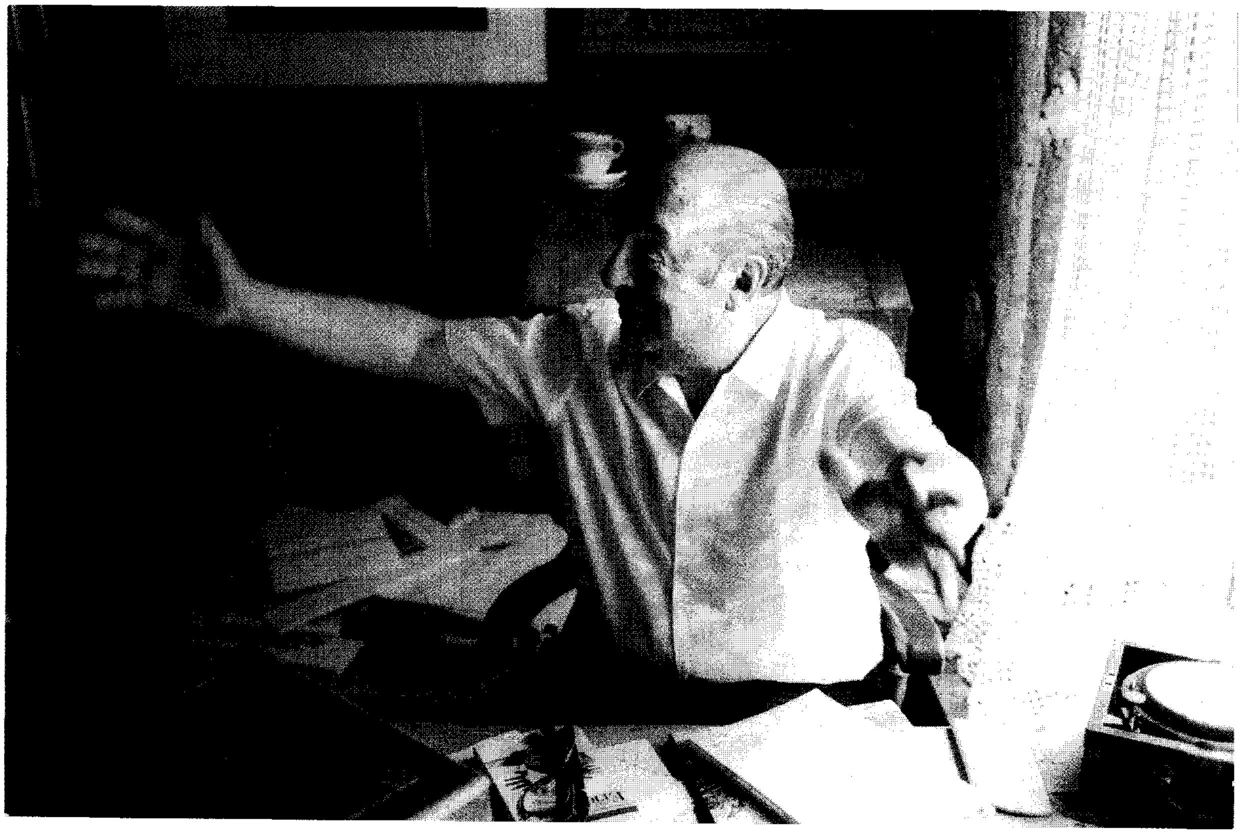
In those days, the attitude of Spaniards toward Spanish America most resembled the way the English used to regard the United States, with an insufferable condescension. Europe was much more immediate to them than the South American continent, and their knowledge of it was vague. So was mine. I had in my head a mixture of school geography, Hollywood epics, Carmen Miranda with fruit on her head, peons asleep under huge sombreros, the bossa nova, and the cha-cha. It may have had something to do with the stasis of Spain at the time, but, through the books and manuscripts that Carlos passed on to me—books like Juan Rulfo's "Pedro Páramo" and Alejo Carpentier's "The Lost Steps"—I began to take an impassioned interest in South America, and to read its turbulent history with some amazement. More than that, I found in the literature a loosening of Spanish from its Castilian restraints, an intense verbal energy. I noticed the same thing in the few Spanish Americans I came across in Barcelona: they had more exuberance than we were used to in Spain and, given the occasion, they turned conversation on its ear, making a playground of the language.



Neruda in Isla Negra, 1969. His friend was sought out and shot, and everywhere about him Neruda saw Spain broken. The war brought about in him a deep political conversion.

LUIS POIROT

When Mario Vargas Llosa came to Barcelona, Carlos introduced me. Mario had left Peru behind and lived in Paris, working for the French radio network: he broadcast to Latin America at night and wrote by day. He had a kind of flashing intensity to him, and a single, burning ambition: to live by his writing. It was nearly impossible, he said, to make a living as a writer in Latin America: editions were small, readers were sparse, and few writers were read beyond their own borders, since tariff barriers in many countries made books hard to come by. While the separate countries of Latin America all had their writers, it made little sense, Mario said, to speak of a "Latin American" literature. As yet, there was no body of writing that had found its way through translation into other literatures and so achieved international recognition. Within a decade, that was to change utterly, with the surge of memorable novels, popularly referred to as the Boom, that appeared in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and received great acclaim in many languages: novels by Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, José Donoso, Alejo Carpentier, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Prior to that eruption, however, very few writers from Spanish America had earned international attention. Foremost among them were the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and the Argentine master Jorge Luis Borges. They were, each in a quite separate way, the forerunners of the writers of the Boom.

I had been introduced to Borges's writing a few years earlier, by Pipina Prieto, a vivacious Argentine who had known him in Buenos Aires and who spoke of him with such fervor that when she pressed his "Ficciones" on me I would not have dared not read it. The effect on an unsuspecting reader of encountering a work of Borges' can be alarming enough almost to justify a publisher's warning on the book jacket. His stories induce a kind of vertigo in his readers, an eerie aftereffect that can invest small happenings, like breaking a glass or missing a train, with ominous significance. Pipina was a bewitching talker, and could practically perform Borges's stories. We talked them over, endlessly, and before long I kept the half-dozen slender books that contained most of his writing then—poems and essays as well as stories—always at hand.

I had been coming across the poetry of Neruda piecemeal, mostly in the houses of friends, for Neruda's books were then proscribed in Spain as Communist literature. There is an extraordinary lift that comes from reading Neruda's poetry for the first time: both from its sheer beauty on the ear and from its great tumble of images. But I found not one but many Nerudas. I read his fierce elegies on the Spanish Civil War, and his tender, whimsical "Ode to My Socks," his sensual love poems, and the high incantatory pitch of his "Heights of Machu Picchu," and I wondered at their accomplished variety but had no sense, yet, of who the poet was among so many incarnations.

Borges in Buenos Aires, 1971. The effect on an unsuspecting reader of encountering a work of Borges' can be alarming enough almost to justify a publisher's warning on the jacket.

ARCHIVE PHOTOS

That these two writers should be acclaimed as the quintessential Spanish-American writers of their time was particularly intriguing to me, for the more I read them the more I felt them to be about as different from each other, as writers and as human souls, as it is possible to be. Borges's work is as spare as Neruda's is ebullient, as dubious and ironic as Neruda's is passionately affirmative, as reticent as Neruda's is voluble. Where Neruda is open, even naïve, Borges is oblique and skeptical; where Neruda is a sensualist, a poet of physical love, a man of appetites, Borges is an ascetic; where Neruda is rooted in what he has experienced, Borges seems to have lived almost entirely in literature, in the mind-travel of his reading. Borges accepted being Argentine as his destiny, Buenos Aires as his locality, but his preoccupations were wholly metaphysical. Where Neruda in his poems addressed the realities of the Latin-American present and lived on intimate terms with the physical world, Borges's writings often cast doubt on the very existence of that world, except as a mental projection, a fiction.

BORGES was born in 1899, in the Buenos Aires suburb of Palermo, into a middle-class professional family: his father was a lawyer and a teacher of psychology with literary aspirations, his mother a descendant of military heroes and Argentine patriots. From an early age, the son was seen by the family as destined to become a writer, fulfilling the ambitions of his father, whose literary career had been stayed by encroaching blindness—a hereditary blindness, which was to descend on Borges gradually from his late twenties. In 1914, the whole family moved to Europe, where they lived for the next seven years—first in Geneva, where Borges studied and read French and German, and then in Spain, where he began to write in earnest. When he returned to Argentina, in 1921, fired by a new enthusiasm for his country, he began a literary career—as a poet, an essayist, and a reviewer, in the world of salons, *tertulias*, and small magazines—that continued all his life.

Neruda had his beginnings in 1904, in Parral, in the rainy south of Chile, where his father worked on the railroad, on the frontier of the great forests. He has recreated his solitary, awestruck childhood, his discovery of the secret life of words, in a number of enchanted poems. Luck seemed to attend him early. His first poems were brought to the attention of the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, and she helped him gain a scholarship to study French in Santiago when he was seventeen. In the capital, he moved from the absorbed solitude of adolescence into an artist's underworld of close friendships, nightlong conversations, sexual love, and the poems of Rimbaud and Baudelaire. It was a heady transformation. Neruda's "Twenty Love Poems and a Song of

Despair," published in 1924 (written in that flush of late adolescence), became, and still are, a kind of touchstone for first love, learned by heart everywhere in the Spanish-speaking world. "I have been marking the blank chart of your body," Neruda writes in one of them, "with crosses of fire / My mouth was a spider that scuttles into hiding / In you, behind you, tremulous and thirsty." These poems are remarkable in their erotic intensity, in their startling sensual directness.

Such early fame led to Neruda's being appointed, in that most enlightened of Latin-American traditions, to the Chilean Consular Service, and between the ages of twenty-three and twenty-eight he was posted in turn to Rangoon, Ceylon, Java, and Singapore. The five years Neruda was away from Chile were a difficult time for him, separated from his language and his roots; yet out of his loneliness and alienation came the cumulative volumes of "Residencia en la Tierra" ("Sojourn on Earth")—hallucinatory poems in which, deprived of his own country, he creates wildly surreal landscapes out of his own private obsessions, with a poetic density quite startlingly new to poetry in Spanish. When he returned to Chile, his fame as a poet had spread so widely that, posted to Spain in 1934, he was acclaimed by the community of Spanish poets, Federico García Lorca and Miguel Hernández among them. But these were the last euphoric days of the Republic. When the Civil War broke out, Neruda remained in Spain, but the experience marked him forever. His friend García Lorca was sought out and shot, and everywhere about him Neruda saw Spain broken. The war brought about in him a deep political conversion. He was asked to resign his consulship because of his outspoken sympathy for the Republic. The poems he wrote at that time are bitter in their anger.

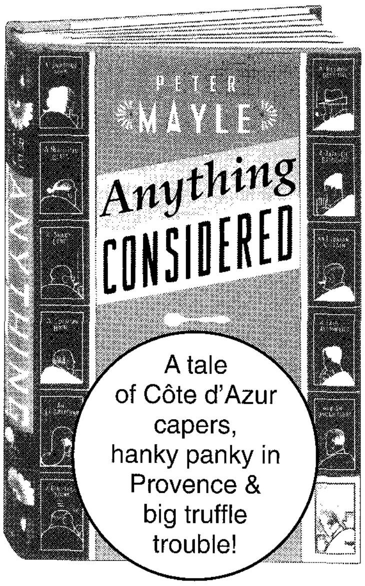
Generals,
traitors,
look at my dead house,
look at broken Spain:
out of every dead house comes burning
    metal
instead of flowers,
out of every crater in Spain
Spain reappears,
out of every dead child comes a rifle
    with eyes,
every crime breeds bullets
that will one day find their way
to your heart.

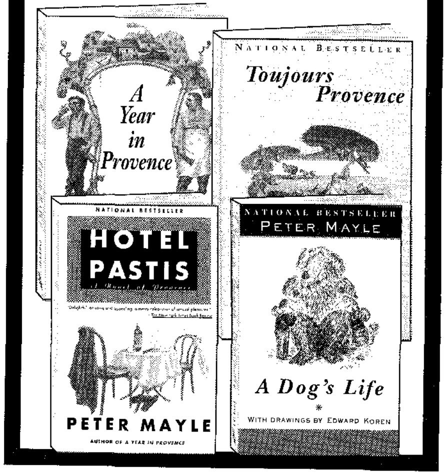
You will ask why don't his poems
tell us of dreams, of leaves,
of the great volcanoes of his homeland?

Come and see the blood in the streets.
come and see
the blood in the streets,
come and see the blood
in the streets!

Back in Chile, Neruda, still haunted by his Spanish experience, joined the Chilean Communist Party, and in 1945 was elected to the Chilean Senate, plunging into an active political life. After he published, in 1947, an open letter criticizing President Gabriel González Videla, he was forced into hiding for an extended period to avoid arrest, and was sheltered in different houses until he could escape over the Andes to Argentina. Out of that came his "Canto General," an enormous hymn to Latin America—its exotic geography, its cruel history, its brutal politics, and its present human wrongs—in a sprawling mass of poems. The book, published in 1950, had an immense impact, more political than poetic. Besides the overtly political poems, however, it contained a sequence of visionary cantos he called "Alturas de Macchu Picchu" ("The Heights of Machu Picchu"). He had visited the Inca shrine in 1943, and these impassioned invocations contain Neruda's poetic creed. He sees Machu Picchu as built on the bones of centuries of oppressed Indians, and he vows to become a voice for all things that have no voice, to speak out for the oppressed of the past and against the oppressions of the present. In this new writing, Neruda abandoned the surreal extravagance of his earlier work, and thenceforth deliberately simplified his poetry, to make it accessible to the people of Chile who gave him shelter in their houses as a fugitive. In Chile, he was now a national possession.

ALONGSIDE such a crowded existence, Borges's life appears singularly static. On his return to Buenos Aires from Europe, he set about rediscovering his native city, first in poems and then in a series of incisive essays on Argentine themes. His world was a purely literary one; he regularly reviewed foreign literature, and translated works of Virginia Woolf, Kafka, Joyce, and Faulkner into Spanish. But his brief literary essays were often oblique and unconventional: with





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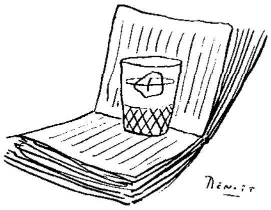
time, a certain playful element showed itself—in quotations ascribed to nonexistent originals, citations of imaginary authors. Although Borges was not writing fiction, he began to intrude fictional elements into his other writings. He used to say that he considered scholarship merely a branch of fantastic literature. He told me once that as a young man he had contemplated writing a long dynastic novel encompassing the history of Argentina since independence, until he realized that he could write, in the span of a few pages, a descriptive review of just such a work by an invented author, adding his reflections on the genre. It was not until 1939, following first the death of his father and then a long convalescence after a near-fatal accident, that he began to write the disquieting stories that were published in 1944 as "Ficciones"—the stories that brought him fame far beyond Argentina.



It is somewhat deceptive to talk of Borges as a storyteller, as a poet, or as an essayist, however, for he blurred these divisions by exploring the same paradoxes in the varying forms of story, poem, and essay. To him they are all "fictions"—words on a page, constructs of the mind. Borges concludes his epilogue to "El Hacedor," a collection he published in 1960, with the following:

> A man sets himself the task of drawing the world.
>
> As the years pass, he fills the empty space with images of provinces and kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fish, houses, instruments, stars, horses, and people. Just before he dies, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of lines traces the image of his own face.

Such fictions are Borges's trademark. From the sixties on, Borges's reputation spread with the speed of a virus through the reading world, infecting it with a sly, humorous skepticism about language, about all matters literary. His writings are deeply subversive—by implication, they call into question all linguistic versions of everything. In whatever Borges writes he never lets his readers forget that what they hold in their hands is a text, a fiction made of words, from a fallible mind. The natural world remains fearful and incomprehensible to us; to contend with it, to give it order and purpose, the mind creates fictions—fables, histories, rules, codes of law, theories, social systems, predictions, even divinities. However "perfect" these fictions might be, reality defies them by remaining chaotic and unpredictable. Yet the making of fictions is essential to our nature: literature, Borges insists, is our solace.

In 1961, Borges shared with Samuel Beckett the Prix International des Éditeurs, which led to immediate translation of his stories into the main European languages. Anthony Kerrigan, who was editing "Ficciones" in English, asked me to translate the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." By then, I had come to know and appreciate Borges's uncharacteristic prose style—a style that is spare, restrained, and carefully formal, and uses something like understatement, not exactly a characteristic of written Spanish. While I worked I had the curious feeling that I was retranslating something back into English that had previously been translated into Spanish. Most crucial to me was to catch the tone—tentative, wary, uncertain—in which Borges writes, a manner that constantly questions what it is telling, sometimes by tone alone.

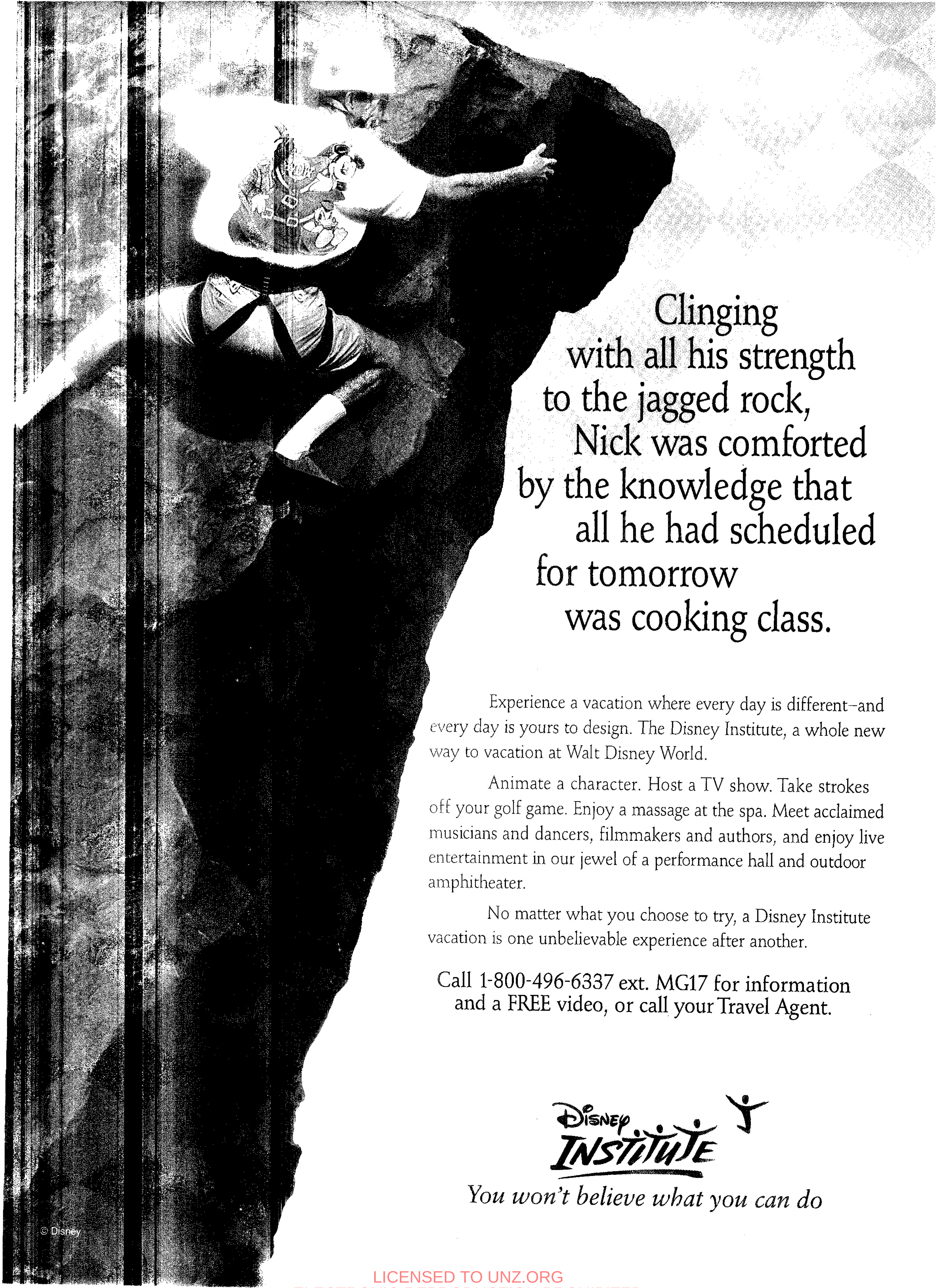
"Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" begins with Borges's discovery, through a chance remark by a friend, of an item in a corrupt encyclopedia about an enigmatic region called Uqbar. The region is apparently fictitious. "Reading it over," Borges says characteristically, "we discovered, beneath the superficial authority of the prose, a fundamental vagueness." Some time later, in a remote hotel, chance puts into Borges's hands a volume of another encyclopedia, devoted to a vast planet called Tlön. A trail of further clues reveals that a group of seventeenth-century sages originally conceived the idea of creating an entirely rational planet—one that would be wholly comprehensible to its inhabitants—and of disseminating knowledge of it by way of a secret encyclopedia. A postscript to the story, set at a future date, describes how the human race eventually embraces the world of Tlön as though it were reality. Objects from Tlön begin to turn up in the real world, and, as in many of Borges's stories, reality gives way to a wished-for fiction.

For Borges, rational systems that are extended to the extreme limits of their rationality turn into nightmare. In his "The Library of Babel," a "total" library is obliged to contain not only all actual books but all possible books as well. The entire world becomes a library. In "The Babylon Lottery," set in an imagined past of Babylon, an apparently rational society elects to introduce some element of chance into its existence by starting a lottery. Bit by bit, to increase the excitement, the numbers of the lottery are made to signify not just prizes but punishments—fines, imprisonment, even execution. The mysterious company administering the lottery is eventually suspected of being a fiction. Babylon gives itself over completely to chance, and order yields irresistibly to chaos.

NERUDA and Borges met only once, in July of 1927, in Buenos Aires. Following the success of "Twenty Love Poems," Neruda, then turning twenty-three, was on his way to take up his first diplomatic appointment, as Chilean consul in Rangoon. Borges, at twenty-seven, had published two volumes of poems and was an active reviewer in the literary magazines of the day. The meeting was one that each of them described in later life: they recalled that they had talked about the unsatisfactory nature of Spanish, and the resignation they both felt at having to write in it. The one enthusiasm they shared was for the poems of Walt Whitman, whose work both of them had translated. The meeting appears to have been more diplomatic than intimate, and they went to some trouble to avoid meeting again. It seems to have occurred to each of them that they had little in common as writers except the Spanish language; as time went on, they were often asked about each other, and in their responses they were most of the time polite and respectful, no more. Borges regarded their meeting as essentially nonserious. Neruda was more specific. In a letter to an Argentine friend he wrote:

> Borges, whom you mention, seems to me over-preoccupied with those problems of culture and society which do not attract me, which are not *human*. I prefer the great wines, love, suffering, and books as a consolation for the inevitable solitude. I even feel a certain scorn for culture as a way of interpreting things. I prefer sure awareness without precedent, a physical absorption in the world. . . . History, the problems of "knowledge," as they are called, seem to me lacking in dimension. How much of it would it take to fill the void? I see around me always fewer ideas, always more bodies, sunshine and sweat. I am exhausted.

For all their youthful excess, Neruda's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Clinging with all his strength to the jagged rock, Nick was comforted by the knowledge that all he had scheduled for tomorrow was cooking class.

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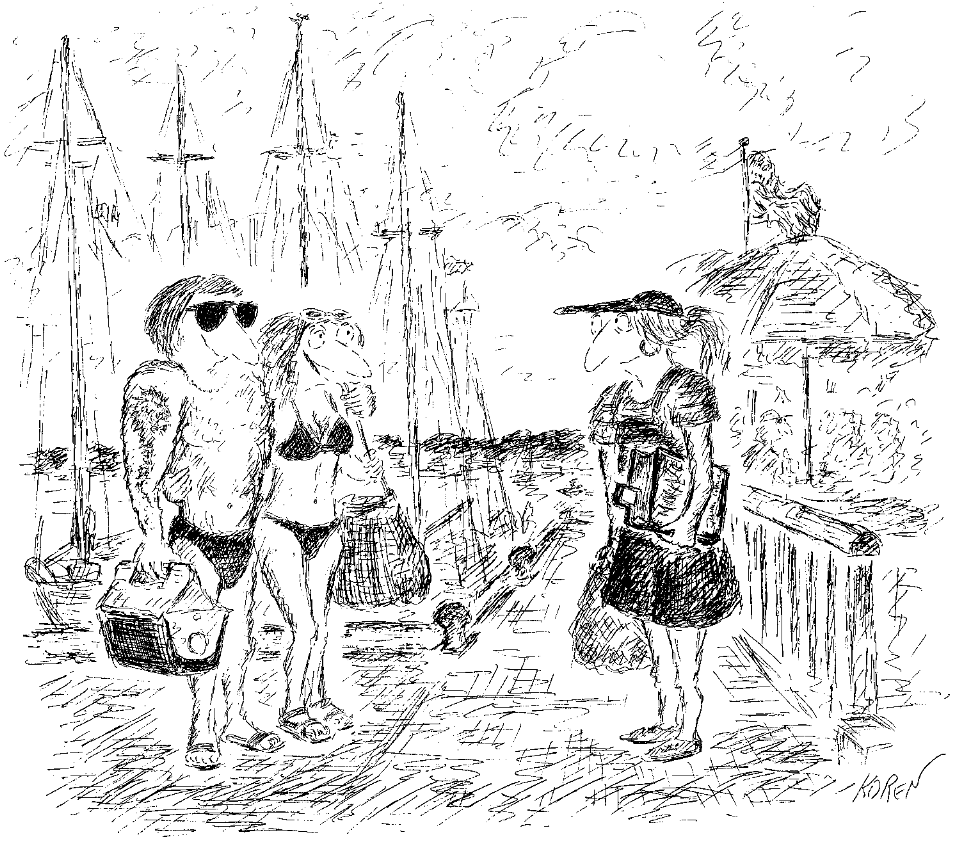
observations, about himself in particular, are remarkably clear. He remained entirely a poet of the physical world, a materialist, actually as well as politically: he had no interest in metaphysical questions, and disliked literary talk. He did not write his poems for literary circles: he wanted them out in the street, read by everyday inhabitants of the language. He achieved just that, in his own time, as has no other poet I can think of. He accomplished what Whitman only aspired to; he became what Whitman had hoped to be.

Borges, on the other hand, remained remote, indecipherable to many: it requires a certain nerve even to try to follow the quirks of his mind. In a celebrated essay, "Kafka and His Precursors," he makes the point that after reading Kafka we recognize foreshadowings of him in the work of writers who preceded him in time, and we refer to them as Kafkaesque. As Borges wrote, "The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future." This is precisely what has happened in Borges's case. Certain intrusions of disquiet that undermine a believed reality are so much a mark of his mind and manner that when we find the same dismaying twists in writers who preceded him in time we refer to these twists as Borgesian.

It may well have been the intense appeal of Borges's writings to academics in all languages that made him such an intrusive literary figure. Books about him abound, theses and critical studies multiply: unravelling Borges is something of an industry. Neruda, to the contrary, has attracted comparatively little critical study: the great mass of his poetry is simply there, always accessible, like the ocean.

THE more I read my way into Spanish America, the more I felt my ignorance of it as a living place. When a piece of time suddenly opened for me in early 1964, I bought a round-trip ticket from New York to Buenos Aires that allowed me an unlimited number of linear stops. I made many. I met a whole web of writers, and they passed me on from one country to friends in the next. I made solitary pilgrimages to shrines like Chichén Itzá and Machu Picchu, but otherwise, wherever I went, I found myself in the middle of a seemingly endless conversation that ranged all the way from pure play to high art. I asked a lot of questions, but mostly I listened.



"Jason is my summer reading."

In mid-February, I landed into a golden summer in Chile. Someone had given me a letter to Jorge Elliot, a painter and art critic in Santiago, and I called on him soon after arriving. He welcomed me as though I had been expected, and invited me to a summer house he had in Isla Negra, the village on the Pacific Coast where Neruda then lived.

Isla Negra was little more than a string of houses built along a low cliff above a broad beach where the Pacific thundered incessantly. The families who lived there knew each other well, and the place had a well-worn, easygoing air. Neruda had settled there in the fifties, in a house perched on the cliff, and he had added to it eccentrically as money came in, book by book. Beside the house stood a ship's yardarm, and as we approached it Jorge pointed out a small blue flag flying from it. "Pablo's at home," he said.

Neruda's garden was dominated by a steamroller that he had rescued, painted, and installed as a shrine. Under the yardarm, a boat was grounded, geraniums growing from its stem, and beyond it lay an anchor, all of them like props from Neruda's poems. We went inside, and into a high-ceilinged living room with stone walls, a fireplace framed by granite boulders from the beach, and a wooden gallery with stairs descending. Objects were everywhere: ships' figureheads leaning out of the corners; driftwood; shells; tackle; books. On a long, heavy table under a wide window that framed the Pacific lay more objects: a ship under glass; a sextant; a telescope; odd-shaped bottles; agates gathered from the beach. The light in the room wavered with the white of the breaking waves below. The house might have been afloat. Suddenly, Neruda called out, and came down from the gallery, a captain descending from his bridge.

He was a large man—portly, even—but majestic and deliberate in his movement. His eyes were large and hooded, rather like those of a bemused lizard, and seemed to take in everything, but slowly. He moved slowly, turned his head slowly, blinked slowly; and when he spoke his voice, mellowly resonant, was close to languid. His words had the weight of stones. I noticed, then and whenever I later met him, that, since he was generally the center of attention, he had a way of slowing down everything around him, pacing the conversation. As he talked, he

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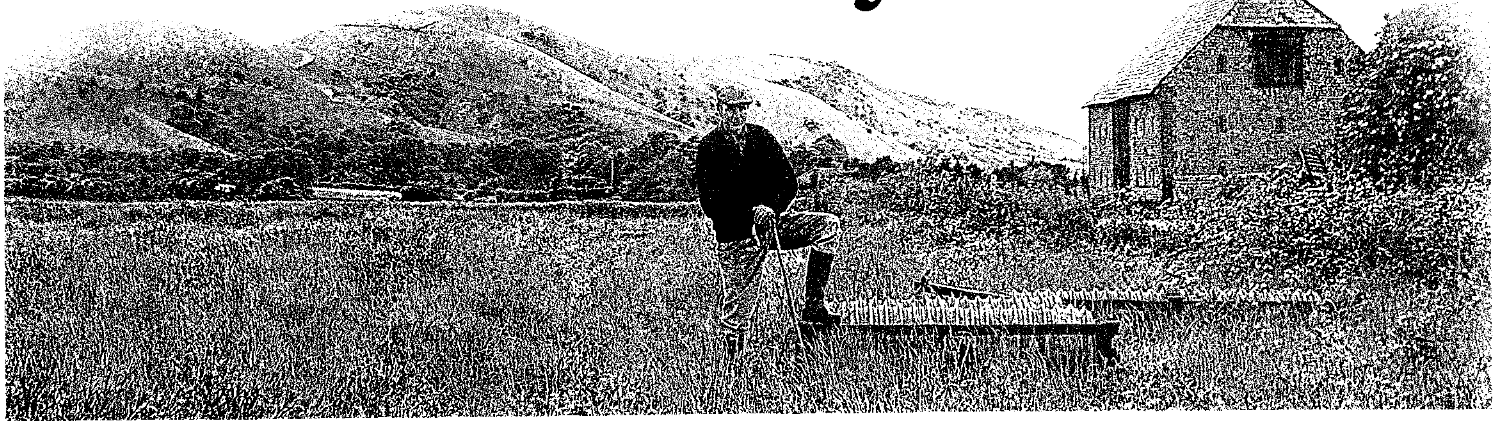

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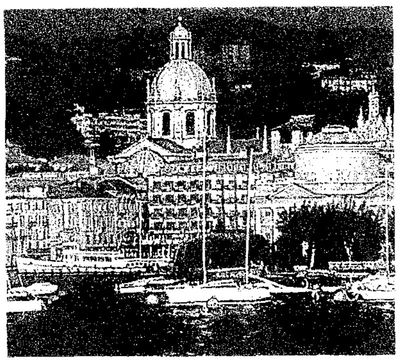

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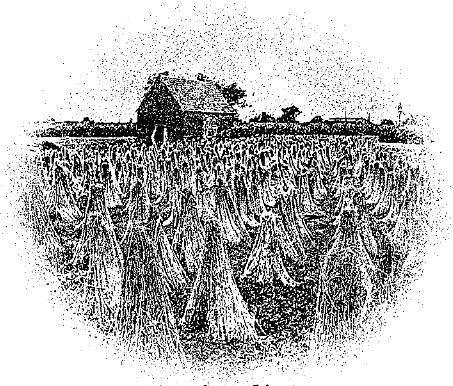

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moved about the room, touching a surface here, picking up an agate from the table and gazing into it, entranced. The objects were a kind of vocabulary: the collections of shells, of ships in bottles, of French postcards, of clocks and hats and walking sticks; a huge wooden shoe he had badgered from a bootmaker; a full-sized papier-mâché horse.

Thinking of Neruda, I still see him in that house: it was an externalization of his whole being. He used to say that he had a secondary profession, as a surreal architect, a transformer of houses. He required of his houses that they be in remarkable places, that they have space for all the multifarious objects he brought back from his travels, that they have a workroom for his writing, and that they be comfortable, humorous, and accessible to his friends. Each house was his private theatre, where he had designed the sets and always played the lead.

Neruda was then in his sixtieth year, and, in anticipation of his birthday, he had written "Memorial de Isla Negra," an autobiography in the form of more than a hundred poems, divided into five sections, each covering a stage of his life. The galley proofs were draped along the back of a sofa. He was also translating "Romeo and Juliet" for performance later that year, and he asked me several questions about the text. Neruda was glum about his translation; English and Spanish did such different things, he said, they were really misfits. After some translation tinkering, we moved outside, to a long table adjoining the kitchen, where Neruda's wife, Matilde Urrutia, came to join us.

In the presence of food and drink, Neruda always expanded visibly. On this occasion, he brought the sheaf of galleys to the table, and at a replete pause he read to us, in that mesmerizing voice, carefully phrased, that seemed to float the poem in the air. I had no inkling of it then, but seventeen years later I was to translate that book in its entirety, poem by poem.

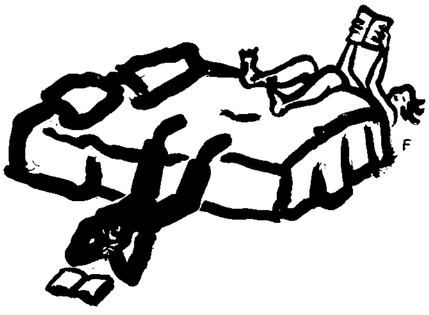
Later that night, I talked with Jorge about Neruda. He found for me a copy of Neruda's brief prose manifesto "On Impure Poetry":

> It is very appropriate, at certain times of the day or night, to look deeply into objects at rest: wheels which have traversed vast dusty spaces, bearing great cargoes of vegetables or minerals, sacks from the coal yards, barrels, baskets, the handles and grips of the carpenter's tools. They exude the touch of man and the earth as a lesson to the tormented poet. Worn surfaces, the mark hands have left on things, the aura, sometimes tragic and always wistful, of these objects lend to reality a fascination not to be taken lightly.
>
> The flawed confusion of human beings shows in them, the proliferation, materials used and discarded, the prints of feet and fingers, the permanent mark of humanity on the inside and outside of all objects.
>
> That is the kind of poetry we should be after, poetry worn away as if by acid by the labor of hands, impregnated with sweat and smoke, smelling of lilies and of urine, splashed by the variety of what we do, legally or illegally.
>
> A poetry as impure as old clothes, as a body, with its foodstains and its shame, with wrinkles, observations, dreams, wakefulness, prophecies, declarations of love and hate, stupidities, shocks, idylls, political beliefs, negations, doubts, affirmations, taxes.

I went back along the sand path to Neruda's house several times. He and I combed the beach for agates at the ebb, laughed a lot, talked a lot, ate and drank exuberantly well. Since I wore no shoes, Pablo and Matilde called me, then and ever after, Patapelá (Barefoot), and when I said my farewells Pablo gave me a volume of his, "Estravagario." We made promises to meet again, somewhere, sometime. Such a meeting seemed to me improbable; but then so did being in Chile, that long, thin, bountiful country.

When I left, I flew to Mendoza, at the foot of the Andes on the Argentine side, and, with two days to wait for the train across the pampas to Buenos Aires, I made notes and read, Isla Negra still vivid in my head. The trees in Mendoza's elegant small squares were shedding their leaves, and under a limpid blue sky the dark wall of the Andes towered in the piercing clarity of the air. It felt to me like Shangri-La.

BUENOS AIRES has always struck me as the most sumptuous of cities: the abundance of its shops and restaurants made Madrid and Barcelona then seem frugal by comparison, and in its well-stocked bookstores I bought the books forbidden us in Spain—principally Neruda's "Collected Poems," a Losada volume, on India paper, of a thousand nine hundred and thirty-two pages. Very little of Buenos Aires seemed Spanish. Listening to conversations in that assured *porteño* accent, I felt that the Spanish language had now detached itself from Spain, and had taken on many different modes. After a day or two of exploring, I telephoned Borges at the National Library where he had been director since 1955. Pipina had written ahead to him, and had given me his number.



He came on the line, and, on identifying me, he changed to his very courteous English and asked me to call on him in the library that afternoon. When I arrived, I was directed by a guard to Borges's office. I must have misheard, for I found myself in the deeper twilit recesses of the library, lost. I might almost have expected it. An assistant rescued me and led me to where Borges sat, at the end of a long library table, a pile of books at hand, in a pool of light cast by the lamp. He rose to greet me, his face upturned toward the sound of my voice.

That meeting, the first of many, so imprinted itself on me that each time I met Borges I felt I was reënacting it. It came in part from his blindness, which meant that one had to find one's way to him, a presence, waiting patiently. To exist for him, people had to come within his earshot, into the pool of his attention, a pool that encompassed a library of blind volumes, all of Borges's memory, all he had read and thought, all he had written and would write. To meet him was to be admitted to the universe of his blindness, to the crowded solitude he inhabited, to the still pool of his attention.

There was something frail about his company—the soft, quiet voice, the conceded vulnerability of his blindness. He mostly spoke to me in English, which he had learned as a child from his paternal grandmother, an Englishwoman of Northumbrian stock—Borges's English had a faint northern cast to it. As he explained once in an interview, "When I was talking to my paternal grandmother I had to speak in a manner that I afterwards discovered was called English, and when I was talking to my mother or her

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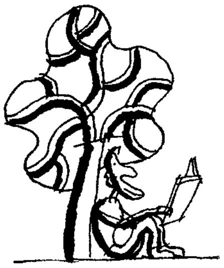
parents I had to talk a language that afterwards turned out to be Spanish." It was in English that he read first, in his father's library. He thought of English ever after as the language of culture, Spanish as the language his mother spoke in the kitchen to the servants, the language of the street and the outside world. He spoke English with the respect due a language he knew well but did not live in: he spoke in the careful cadence of books. On other occasions, in Spanish-speaking company, he would become much more mischievous, less solemn. Yet I think it was the very fact of his bilingual upbringing that gave him his acute sense of the arbitrary and deceptive nature of language: a bilingual is much more aware of the gulf between word and thing than someone confined to a single language.

Irony accompanied Borges like a familiar, present not only in everything he wrote but also in so many of the circumstances of his life: in the family's understanding that he would become a writer and yet would probably succumb to the congenital blindness that had afflicted his father and five preceding generations; in his appointment as director of the National Library just when he was no longer able to read the volumes he presided over. When we left the library for a walk on the Southside, the Buenos Aires of many of his poems, his one hand lightly in the crook of my arm, his stick ever present in the other, it was I who was seeing the city and reading the street signs, but it was Borges who provided the footnotes and the anecdotes. Sometimes, invoking a text, he paused as if leafing through a library in his head before finding the book and the page and haltingly bringing back the sentence or the line.



Around Borges in Buenos Aires I sensed a host of attendant spirits—waiters and taxi-drivers who knew his ways, friends ready to read to him or take his dictation, assistants in the library who watched over him—for now that his fame had spread to Europe and the United States he had become a national treasure. Passersby in the street murmured his name as a kind of salutation. I returned him to the library, to the guard who stood by the door. We said our goodbyes, and I moved out of the circle of his attention into the labyrinth of that inexhaustible city, of which he once wrote:

> Hard to believe Buenos Aires had any beginning.
> I feel it to be as eternal as air and water.

Although I then spent some days in Brazil, I realized that I had reached a kind of saturation, that I had enough to occupy my mind for a foreseeable time. So I made my way, by stages, back to Spain, where I unpacked my book hoard. In the late seventies, I was to do the reverse: pack and send books from the newly democratic Spain to friends in Chile and Argentina, both then in political darkness.

But at this time it was Spain that had become politically uncomfortable, and in late 1966 I returned to Britain, moving to London with my son, Jasper, to live for the next three years on a houseboat on the Thames at Chelsea Reach. Fastened to London only by our mooring, we felt ourselves to be something of an offshore island. We found many Latin-American friends in London at that time, Mario Vargas Llosa and Guillermo Cabrera Infante among them. Sometimes the boat sounded like a Spanish-American outpost moored to the Chelsea embankment.

Earlier that year, I had met Emir Rodríguez Monegal, a longtime friend and chronicler of both Borges and Neruda. Emir—dark, sharp-faced, incisive, and with great charm—had just been appointed director of a new cultural review called *Mundo Nuevo*, which he edited from Paris. Emir came to England once a week to give a seminar at Cambridge, and regularly stopped off at the houseboat on the way. A prodigious and perceptive reader, he had realized that, at that particular moment in the countries of Spanish America, a number of extraordinary writers were surfacing, and that all at once a Latin-American literature was coming into being, more than fulfilling the prediction that Carlos Barral had made in Barcelona. *Mundo Nuevo*, which, under Monegal, ran to just twenty-five issues, is often credited with having launched the Boom. Emir published the work of Cabrera Infante, the brilliant Cuban writer who had just then sought political asylum in London, as well as the first fragment of García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude." García Márquez was politically in sympathy with Neruda, and revered him as a poet, yet his book also shows everywhere the influence of Borges—in how it regards odd and magical happenings as natural events, and sees everywhere the collisions between private fictions and an unyielding reality.

The shadows of Neruda and Borges hung over the whole generation of writers that followed them—not so much as direct literary influences but as forerunners. Neruda held out his vision of a South American *continent*, sharing a turbulent history, a singular humanity, and a common plight. Borges swept away the previous restraints of realism by demonstrating that fiction creates a separate world, where a writer can make his own laws and create his own appropriate language. While Spanish America's younger writers mostly took their passion and politics from Neruda, it was Borges who reminded them of the magical nature of their craft. Emir once suggested to me that, just as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, seen as sides of the same person, reflect the contradictions of the Spanish character, so the Spanish-American psyche could be thought of as embracing the sensual immediacy of Neruda and the labyrinthine questionings of Borges.

Borges and Neruda gave extensive interviews to Rita Guibert for a book she published in 1973 on Latin American writers. Of Borges's politics Neruda had this to say:

> If he thinks like a dinosaur, that has nothing to do with my thinking. He doesn't understand a thing about what's happening in the modern world, and he thinks that I don't either. Therefore, we are in agreement.

When Borges was questioned on his politics, he answered this way:

> My only commitment is to literature and my own sincerity. As for my political attitude, I've always made it perfectly clear: I've been anti-communist, anti-Hitler, anti-Peronist, and anti-nationalist. . . . If a story or a poem of mine is successful, its success springs from a deeper source than my political views, which may be erroneous and are dictated by circumstances. In my case, my knowledge of what is called political reality is very incomplete. My life is really spent among books, many of them from a past age.

For Borges, an intellectual anarchist, politics took place in the street, not in his mind, yet he was not untouched by them.

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His family, professional and middle class, traditionally voted conservative, and when the Second World War broke out they were emphatically pro-British. In 1946, Borges had made known in print his opposition to Juan Perón's dictatorship, which he saw as pro-Axis. He was dismissed from his post in a municipal library and appointed poultry inspector in a public market, a post he never filled but a humiliation he never forgot. The military government that succeeded Perón, in 1955, made amends by appointing Borges the director of the National Library, which was tantamount to appointing him the national touchstone he became.

TO WHOEVER IS READING ME

You are invulnerable. Have they not granted you,
those powers that preordain your destiny,
the certainty of dust? Is not your time
as irreversible as that same river
where Heraclitus, mirrored, saw the symbol
of fleeting life? A marble slab awaits you
which you will not read—on it, already written,
the date, the city, and the epitaph.
Other men, too, are only dreams of time,
not indestructible bronze or burnished gold;
the universe is, like you, a Proteus.
Dark, you will enter the darkness that expects you,
doomed to the limits of your travelled time.
Know that in some sense you are already dead.

—JORGE LUIS BORGES

(*Translated, from the Spanish, by Alastair Reid.*)

FROM the sixties on, I translated a fair part of Borges's poetry for various selections of his work; and I collaborated in an edition of Neruda's "Selected Poems," going on later to translate several single volumes of his. Translating someone's work, poetry in particular, has something about it akin to being possessed, haunted. Translating a poem means not only reading it deeply and deciphering it but clambering about backstage among the props and the scaffolding. I found I could no longer read a poem of Neruda's simply as words on a page without hearing behind them that languid, caressing voice. Most important to me in translating these two writers was the sound of their voices in my memory, for it very much helped in finding the English appropriate to those voices. I found that if I learned poems of Neruda's by heart I could replay them at odd moments, on buses, at wakeful times in the night, until, at a certain point, the translation would somehow set. The voice was the clue: I felt that all Neruda's poems were fundamentally vocative—spoken poems, poems of direct address—and that Neruda's voice was in a sense the instrument for which he wrote. He once made a tape for me, reading pieces of different poems, in different tones and rhythms. I played it over so many times that I can hear it in my head at will. Two lines of his I used to repeat like a Zen koan, for they seemed to apply particularly to translating:

in this net it's not just the strings
  that count
but also the air that escapes through
  the meshes.

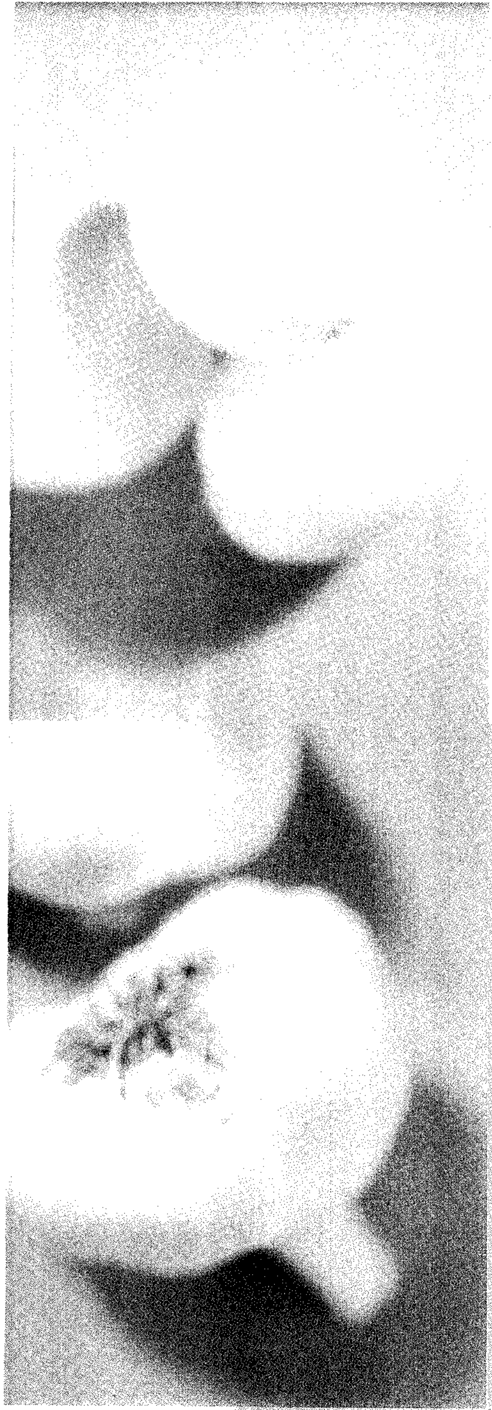
He often wrote of himself as having many selves, just as he had left behind him several very different poetic manners and voices. In talking to Rita Guibert, he explained his protean nature thus: "If my poetry has any virtue it's that it's an organism, it's organic and emanates from my own body. When I was a child, my poetry was childish, it was youthful when I was young, despairing when I was suffering, aggressive when I had to take part in the social struggle, and there is still a mixture of all these different tendencies in the poetry I write now, which may perhaps be at the same time childish, aggressive, and despairing. . . . I have always written from some inner necessity. . . . I'm an anti-intellectual, I don't much care for analysis or for examining literary currents, and I'm not a writer who subsists on books, although books are necessary to my life." His dutiful political poems are mainly forgettable, but occasionally the politics and the poetry come together, as in his meditation on food and hunger, "The Great Tablecloth," which concludes:

Let us sit down soon to eat
with all those who haven't eaten,
let us spread great tablecloths,
put salt in the lakes of the world,
set up planetary bakeries,
tables with strawberries in snow,
and a plate like the moon itself
from which we will all eat.

For now I ask no more
than the justice of eating.

There is so much of Neruda in that single last couplet.

Then I would turn to the universe of Borges. Bringing his poetry into English was much more straightforward. Borges made constant use of certain English verse forms—rhymed quatrains and sonnets in particular—so that translating them required mainly a good ear and a certain prosodic agility in English. In the case of his sonnets, I was careful not to torture them into matching form in English—ingenuity at the expense of poetry. While Neruda's poems are wide-ranging, in their subject matter, their manner, their gesture, their tone, so that they must be taken singly, as separate events, Borges's poems are related to one another, not just in their formal manner and their heraldry of recurring symbols—chessboards, maps, knives, mirrors, coins, labyrinths, tigers, libraries—but in their skeptical, questioning undertone. They let you in on a secret, as observer, as eavesdropper. Translating Borges felt to me like learning a private language: the exact cast of certain favorite words of his, like the noun *olvido*, which he uses to mean either death or sleep or forgetting, and of certain of his vertiginous adjectives, has to be intuited every time. Borges is a much less adventurous or original poet than Neruda: for him, poetry is one of the several dimensions of language he explored, and his poems are mainly parts of a larger whole. He did, however, write a handful of very memorable single poems, like his "Matthew, 25:30," in



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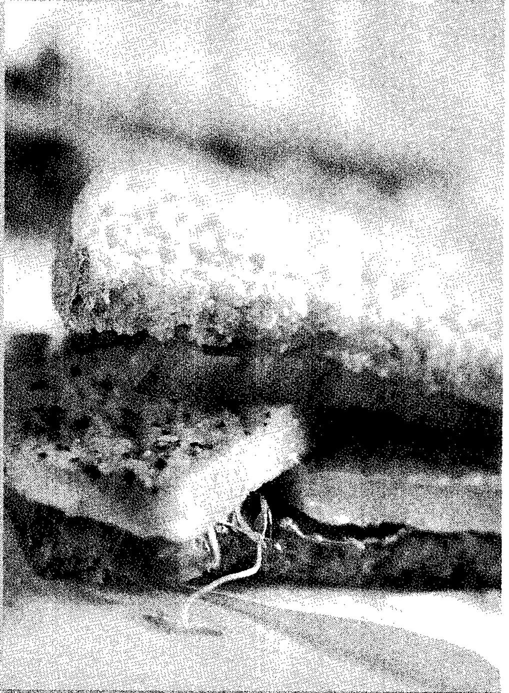

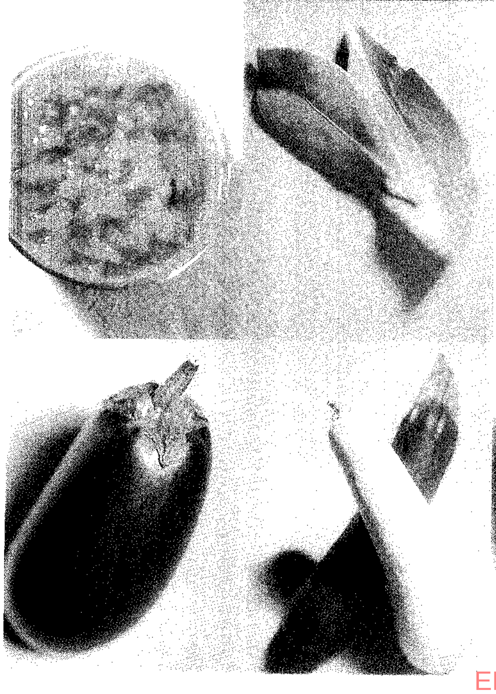

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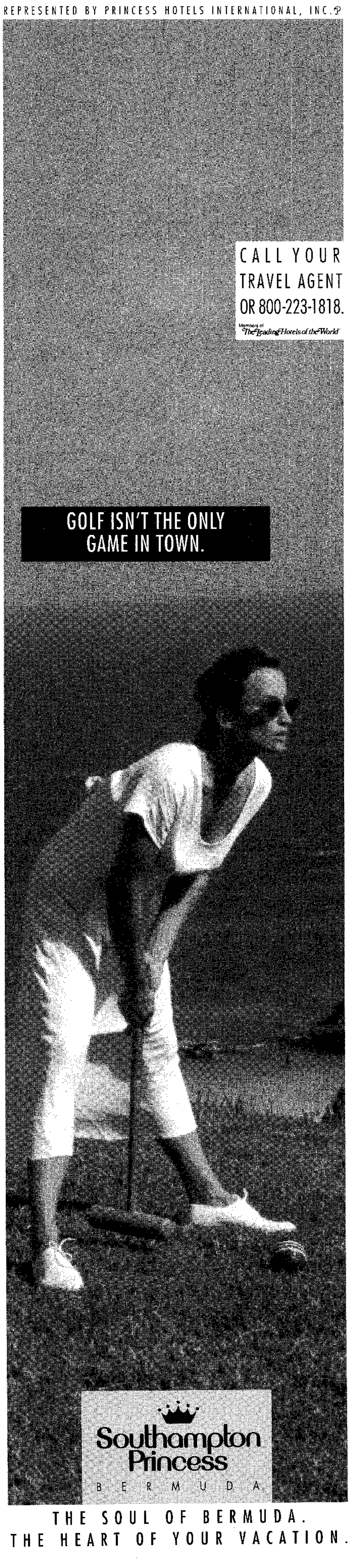
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which he imagines a voice confronting him with the vocabulary of his own existence:

> "Stars, bread, libraries of East and West,
> playing cards, chessboards, galleries, skylights, cellars,
> a human body to walk with on the earth,
> fingernails, growing at nighttime and in death,
> shadows for forgetting, mirrors that endlessly multiply,
> falls in music, gentlest of all time's shapes,
> borders of Brazil, Uruguay, horses and mornings,
> a bronze weight, a copy of Grettir Saga,
> algebra and fire, the charge at Junín in your blood,
> days more crowded than Balzac, scent of the honeysuckle,
> love, and the imminence of love, and intolerable remembering,
> dreams like buried treasure, generous luck,
> and memory itself, where a glance can make men dizzy—
>
> all this was given to you and, with it,
> the ancient nourishment of heroes—
> treachery, defeat, humiliation.
> In vain have oceans been squandered on you, in vain
> the sun, wonderfully seen through Whitman's eyes.
> You have used up the years and they have used up you,
> and still, and still, you have not written the poem."

PABLO and Matilde turned up in London in 1967, and when Pablo heard that I lived on a houseboat he came straight to inspect it. He decided he must hold his birthday fiesta there, an evening brimming with Chileans, in the course of which a Ukrainian poet had to be rescued from the Thames mud. I accompanied Pablo to the street market in Petticoat Lane and to a ship's chandler by the docks in a vain search for a ship's figurehead. He was anxious to have me translate the whole of "Estravagario," a favorite book of his, and I agreed with pleasure. In England, wrapped in a Chilean poncho, Pablo looked unnaturally cold, but when we gave a reading together in the Queen Elizabeth Hall I listened to his voice spreading itself like a balm over the English audience—a magical sound, even without the string of sense. After the reading, he was courtesy itself, while regularly casting a side glance in my direction, dinner on his mind.

After being closeted for a spell with the still photographs of his poems, I found it a relief to spend time with the moving original. I knew Neruda much better now, by way of his poems. He was always ready to answer any questions I had about them, even to talk about them, fondly, as about lost friends, but he was not much interested in the mechanics of translation. Once, in Paris, while I was explaining some liberty I had taken, he stopped me and put his hand on my shoulder. "Alastair, don't just translate my poems. I want you to improve them."

In 1969, Neruda stood as Communist candidate for the Presidency of Chile, but after a brief campaign he dropped out and threw his support behind his friend Salvador Allende; and Allende, once elected, in 1970, appointed Neruda Chilean Ambassador to France. From then on, Pablo and I saw each other frequently, for he came to London every so often. We had an easy friendship: in his eyes, I, as translator, had joined his cast, and, although he became very much a public poet again, especially following his Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1971, he would shed his official self in the company of friends, as at a backstage party. In the vast Chilean Embassy in Paris, he ignored the voluminous public rooms and furnished a room in his own suite as a French café, with tables, wire chairs, and a zinc bar: it was there that diplomacy, politics, literature, and friendships were all enacted. I had been in Chile in his absence, and, having stayed in his house in Isla Negra, I brought him a full report on the state of the garden and on an extension being built while he was away. Then, late in 1972, he wrote me, saying that he was resigning and returning to Chile. His health had been failing, he explained, and he wanted to be attended to at home. The day of his homecoming was celebrated as a national holiday in Chile, but already, as he had hinted, ominous signs were in the air—not only of Neruda's deteriorating health but of a menacing opposition emerging in Chilean politics. Then, on September 11, 1973, the military coup savaged Chile, and twelve days later Neruda died of cancer in a clinic in Santiago. Now only the poems remained. The tape he had made me became, suddenly, like a precious relic, except that I had long since transferred it to my memory, where it never needed rewinding:

> It is time, love, to break off that sombre rose,
> shut up the stars and bury the ash in the earth;

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and, in the rising of the light, wake with those awaking
or go on in the dream, reaching the other shore of the sea which has no other shore.

WHILE Neruda was running for President in Chile, my son and I were living by the sea on the outskirts of St. Andrews in Scotland, and there we received a letter from Borges announcing a forthcoming stop on his way to receive an honorary degree at Oxford. He arrived with María Kodama, a graceful, gentle Argentine woman of Japanese ancestry, who acted as his travelling companion, and whom he married, to the gratification of his friends, shortly before he died. He was much affected by being in Scotland, as though his reading had suddenly come to life. He took walks with my son beside the North Sea and pulled Border ballads from his memory. In those few unplanned days, he laid aside the obligation to be Borges, the public self to which his writings bound him, as he described it in his short fiction "Borges and I":

> I live, I allow myself to live, so that Borges can unwind his writings, and these writings justify me. . . . Years ago, I tried to free myself from him and I went from writing down the myths of my district to devising games with time and infinity, but these games have become part of Borges by now, and I will have to think up something else. . . . I don't know which of us is writing this page.

By now, Borges was regularly accepting some of the many invitations that came his way—to lecture, to receive honorary degrees and cultural decorations, in Europe and the United States. Reverential audiences came to hear him, as if to confirm that he existed. Once, visiting him in Buenos Aires in 1978, I asked him about his sudden appetite for travel. "When I am at home in Buenos Aires," he told me, "one day is much like another. But when I travel—and you must realize that for me, since I am blind, travelling means merely changing armchairs—friendly ghosts materialize one by one and talk to me about literature, and about my own writings, most generously. For a writer, that is great luxury. I feel blessed by it, I feel lucky."

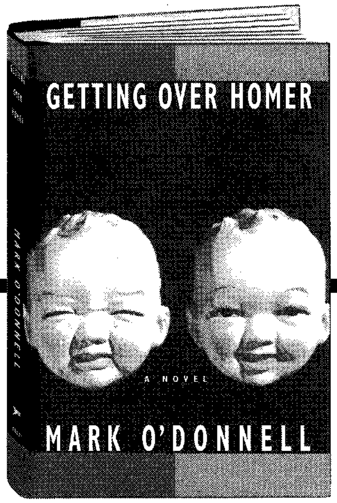
Borges had grown tired of lecturing, and when he visited New York, in the late seventies, he would sometimes telephone me and invite me to join him in giving a *charla*—a conversation onstage in which I would ask him questions inviting to his mind. He loved to talk of the hazards of translation: as he once wrote, "Nothing is as consubstantial with literature and its modest mystery as the questions raised by a translation." On these occasions, I would sometimes try to surprise him with a question, and as often as not he would surprise me back. I grew to know well a certain movement of his mind, in which he would first make a straightforward statement about a book or a writer and then, after a gravid pause, abruptly undermine it with an ironic afterthought, a subversive aside, mischievous, mocking, desolemnizing.

In 1985, in New York, Borges gave me a copy of a recent poem. It had no title, and after some deliberation he decided to call it "The Web." It began:

Which of my cities
am I doomed to die in?
Geneva,
where revelation reached me
from Virgil and Tacitus?

My translation of the poem lay patiently in *The New Yorker* files until June of 1986, when it saw the light: I received a copy of the magazine while I was in Mexico City. Soon after, coming in from a walk, I switched on the television to find the Mexican poet Octavio Paz talking about Borges in the past tense. He had died earlier that day, in Geneva.

All that time, of occasional meetings interspersed with long periods of immersion in their texts, gave me a curious and complex connection to both of these men. Rereading them, I see always more clearly the interweaving of their writings and their lives—their poems as incarnations. I find nothing at all contradictory in accommodating them both. Borges used to say that when writers die they become books—a quite satisfactory incarnation in his view. With luck, however, I think they become voices. In many conversations with Borges, from the formal to the fanciful, I realized sharply that to him I existed only as a voice. That may have led to my deep conviction that voice is perhaps the most essential and lasting incarnation of any existence. More than that, it is in voices, far beyond photographs, that the dead continue to live. In the case of Neruda and Borges, their voices were for me the crucial, guiding element in my translating them. I think of their writings as encapsulations of their voices, and I hear them often in my head, always with awe, and with enduring affection. ◆



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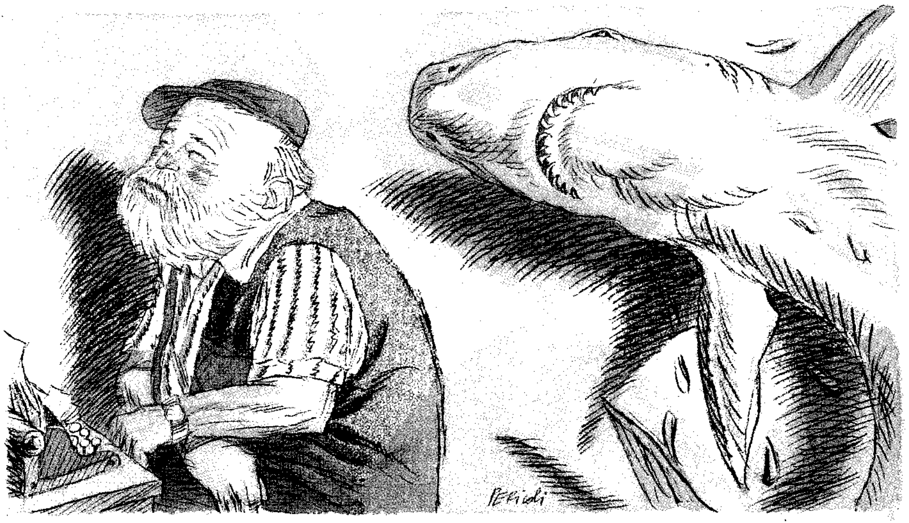
LETTERS · ERNEST HEMINGWAY AND MAXWELL PERKINS

THREE WORDS

In the late nineteen-twenties, the obscenity laws in the United States were enforced largely by the Post Office, which, as the national distributor of most printed matter, exercised enormous power. Books were promoted by serialization in magazines before publication, and that enabled the Post Office to stop delivery if the language or the scenes were judged to be too graphic. In 1929, Scribner's accepted Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms," and excerpts from the book ran that spring in Scribner's Magazine. When the June installment was banned in Boston, editors feared that publication of the book would be stopped, too. The three words "fucking," "cocksucker," and "balls" caused considerable concern. Maxwell Perkins was the editorial director of Scribner's, and his job required him to anticipate the censor's response. The novelist Owen Wister read the manuscript at Perkins' behest, without Hemingway's permission. (The following are excerpts from letters recently released from private collections; the punctuation has been modified.)



TULLIO PERICOLI

Key West, Florida
February 16, 1929

DEAR MAX—

Here are the pictures of your fish. It was wonderful to have you here. We all enjoyed it very greatly. I would have written before but caught my old bad throat clearing fish out of the ice house and was in bed with the throat pretty bad. Before it happened—the Sunday after you left—had a wonderful day in the Gulf stream. It was calm, almost oily. Hooked a sailfish that ran out 250 yards of line on the Vom Hofe reel and light rod and had 40 minute fight. He was just over 8 feet long. Record here for this year. Completely pooped me with the light tackle. He seemed strong as a tarpon. 1/2 hour later Charles hooked a Mako shark out in the Gulf and fought him 3 hours and 20 minutes. The shark jumped like a tarpon—straight up high clear of the water.

I'm awfully glad they are going to serialize and the Price is fine. [*Scribner's Magazine* paid Hemingway sixteen thousand dollars.]

About omissions. They can only be discussed in the concrete examples. I told you I would not be unreasonable—don't mind the leaving out of a word if a blank is left or if the omission is unavoidable and as for passages—almost every part of the book depends on almost every other part. You know that. So if a passage is dropped there should be something to show it. That will not hurt the serial and will help the book. People might be curious to see the book and see what that passage contained. It's not a regular serial anyway.

My point is that the operation of emasculation is a tiny one. It is very simple and easy to perform on men, animals, and books. It is not a Major operation but its effects are great. It is *never* performed *intentionally* on books. What we must both watch is that it should not be performed unintentionally.

I know, on the other hand, that you will not want to print in a magazine certain words and, you say, certain passages.

I think you are very fine about the price. If I haven't said more about it it is because while we are friends I am no blanket friend of the entire organization and have the feeling from experience that the bull fighter is worth whatever he gets paid. However I think you are fine about the price. You are generous and I appreciate it. I may want some of the money quite soon. Will write This letter in great haste.

[New York]
May 24, 1929

DEAR ERNEST:

I'm about to send you the book proof. Don't delay the reading because of the fact that we have a good margin in time, but still don't feel hurried. The book is so remarkable that if you want to work further on any parts of it, you ought to do it. A book that can touch one more deeply on the third reading than on the first ought not to be rushed through the final stages—so take the time you need.

It has been read here now by those who will be most active in "pushing" it: their interest in it is not less than fanatical. I have thought and talked about it for some three months now, and beyond the few slight comments on the margin of the proof I have one or two more serious ideas on it which I dare give you because I know you will know easily whether to reject them, and won't mind doing it—and if you do it I'll believe you're right: I see plainly that you go down to the very bottom at any cost to test the truth of everything. Only you can do that—not many writers, even, have the strength to—and that brings the right decision.

Otherwise, there's nothing much to say, except that if you could reduce somewhat the implications of physical aspects in the relationship I doubt that harm would be done. But here I may be influenced by the dangers of censorship. My whole intention is to put these things in mind—I have most absolute confidence in your judgment and wouldn't want to influence it if I could.

I hope you're all well now. Write if you can.

Paris, France
June 7, 1929

DEAR MAX:

I've just finished a labored letter on the word business.

Please don't feel badly about the Wister thing. Your cable explained it. It's nothing. But don't think I blame you either. I haven't thought of it since the cable came.

Please believe that I understand and appreciate both your and Wister's suggestions and was a fool to blow up. And for God's sake, not to mention your author's, don't worry and do take care of yourself because soon you'll have the cursed hay fever anyway and that's enough of a hell for any man without anything else.

I hate to add any worry to you with my attitude on the publishable or unpublishable word business. But that is only official worry remember. You know what I want—all we can possibly get. It's a fight with me for the return to the full use of the language and what we accomplish in that direction may be of more value in the end than anything I write. I never use a word if I can avoid it, but if I must have it I know it. Then if you decide it is unpublishable really unpublishable I suppose I must leave it blank. But I want the blanks to indicate what the word is.

It's been fine outside all day but I've been with the proofs. Now there is a big storm coming up—dark sky and everyone shutting windows. Couldn't you come to Spain in Aug. or Sept. No hay fever. We could go in the car and fish.

July 12, 1929

DEAR ERNEST:

Everything goes well. We considered taking the Boston ban to court, but all advice was that this could accomplish nothing in the specific instance, and probably nothing in a general sense. Their law is such that intelligent people in Massachusetts oppose it, but have not yet been able to get it changed—Irish Catholics rule the town. There was, and there is still, considerable anxiety for fear of the federal authorities being stirred up. They seem to take curious activity of late, and if the post office should object, we would be in Dutch. The thing could be fought out, but it would take so much time as to be very serious. But we do not have to cross any such bridge as that until we come to it. The question does, however, affect the book in this way—it has been

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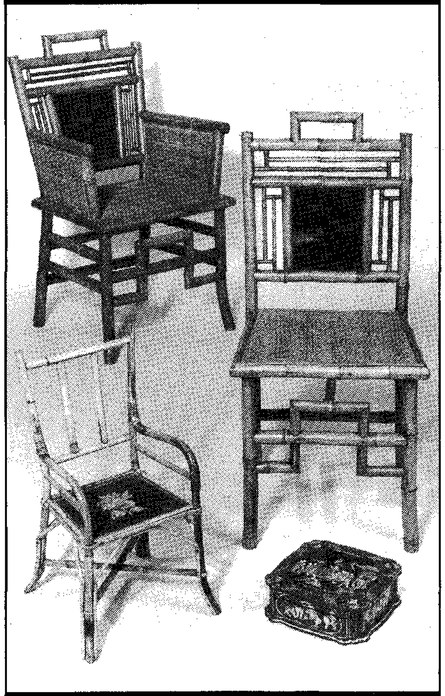

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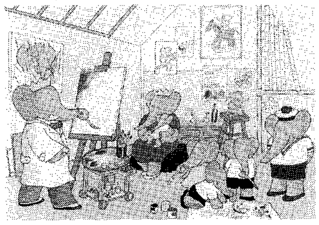

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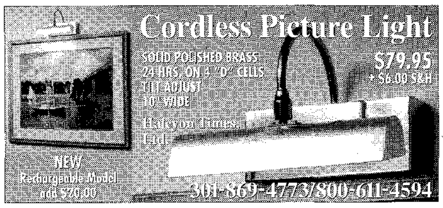

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immensely admired, but also it has aroused fierce objection. This means that when the book appears it will be scrutinized from a prejudiced standpoint, and this, taken with everything else, did make us conclude, what we had always felt anyhow, that the three words we have talked so much about could not be printed, or plainly indicated. This is bad in connection with Miss Van Campen except that I do not see how anybody could fail to get the sense. Anyhow, we went over this thing with the strongest inclination to play the game to the limit with you, and we felt that if we get in trouble in just a matter of words like this, you would be in the least defensible position, because they could easily be defined as indecent and impure, etc., etc. They would from a technical point, and they would arouse prejudice. This point of prejudice I think is hard for you to understand, but there is no question about the fact of it. Anyhow, that is the way the thing worked out after I had talked with Mr. Scribner at great length about it. Everything else in the book goes, of course, as you have put it, exactly.

Hotel Regina
Valencia, Spain
July 26, 1929

Dear Max:

As I understand it from your last letter the book is being published as it appears in the last galleys I sent you except that "the three words we have talked so much about can not be printed nor clearly indicated."

I take it this means the word b—— spoken to Miss Van Campen will be left blank. The other two words must be [those] spoken by Piani where the drivers are talking before leaving Gorizia on the retreat and the word spoken by Piani when Aymo is shot by the Italian rear guard and the same word spoken by the Lieutenant Henry when arrested by the battle police after crossing the Tagliamento. I take it these words are to be blank.

I understand your position i.e. Scribner's position. The Boston thing was to be expected. I do not see how it could be expected not to be banned in Boston when the "Sun Also" was.

I regret very much the Boston incident but the book—if *any* of it were allowed to remain—could not pass the Boston Standard of censorship.

I understand your viewpoint about the words you cannot print. If you cannot print them, and I never expected you could print the one word (c—s—), then you cannot and that lets me out.

I would like to stop writing to you as the official representative of the Great Organization and ask you personally what about the advance business. You know I do not want any money I do not earn and prefer to have it paid after it is earned. Now that I have all these bloody people to support [Hemingway's mother, his father having killed himself the year before; his first wife, Hadley Richardson; and Pauline, his new wife, whom he married in 1927] and can't write more than a book every 2 years I have to make all I legitimately can. Especially I have to have money ahead in the bank to see them through at least a year at a time. The best way is to get a good advance. But I don't want to become unpopular or to get in wrong with you or Scribner's.

Especially not with you. I'm afraid I said something in one of the letters about the word business that offended you. But if I did it was not intentional and I hope I didn't. I write the damned letters when I'm pooped from working over the proofs and if I'm ever rude forgive me.

Am feeling badly now from trying every day to write stories and not being able to write a damned bit and so as always—this seems like my last book. Wister is such a sweet old bird. What a skunk I was to write cursing him out to you. You did destroy the letter didn't you?

I'm sick of all of it. Of course I have nothing to complain of. You have been swell (what a lousy word to mean so much) consistently. But I am sick of writing; of the disaster of a family debacle; of the shit-i-ness of critics—of damned near everything but Pauline and to get back to Key West and Wyoming—Paris has been—nasty enough.

This letter is enough and too much—but don't confuse me with this un-understanding user of obsolete Anglo-Saxon words you consider your adversary as an officer of Scribner's but rather (if only in P.S.es) as your fellow absinthe drinker, tarpon seeker and non-discusser of advertising (tho probably have discussed much worse in this letter).

[P.S.] What about saying kicked in the *scrotum* in connection with Miss Van

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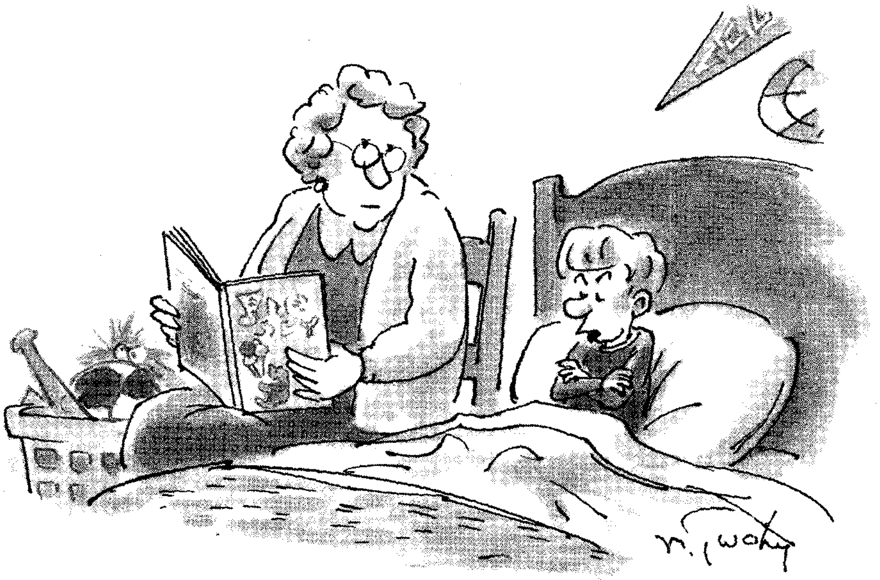

"I'll listen for a dollar."

• •

Campen. Remember the last time balls was changed to Horns—isn't that O.K.?

Paris, France
October 3, 1929

DEAR MAX:

The books haven't come. But I heard today they were on sale at Galignani's and went down there and bought two.

Your cable about the first reviews came (Thanks ever so much) and your letter about newspaper syndicating. I agree with you about the latter and would not want it unless (1) It would help *in every way* the book (2) It would bring in some respectable sum of money (over 1000 dollars). I believe it would hurt rather than help the book. Don't want it.

Anyhow I don't like it and won't sell to anybody to cut.

God knows it's cut enough.

About the Jacket. You must know best but it seems lousy to me. I'm no actress wanting the name in big electric lights. But the name must have some value as a selling point and comparing it to the jackets of the "Sun Also" it's a little over half as big type and about 1/3 as big as on "Men Without Women." All I know about the effect of the jacket is that with the book in a pile on the counter with other books and me looking for it I could not find it and the clerk had to find it for me.

It looks as though the jacket designer had been so wrapped up in the beautiful artistic effort on the front that she had tried to eliminate if possible the title and author's name so they wouldn't intrude on the conception of that nude figure with those so horrible legs and those belly muscles and the big shouldered lad with the prominent nipples who is holding the broken axle (signifying no doubt the defeat of The Horse Drawn Vehicle).

You understand this is a layman's criticism. The old "Sun" jacket that I didn't care for when I saw it—looks like a masterpiece now compared to this one. Really and truly if the book is banned anywhere I think it will be on account of that girl on the cover.

In the blurb. Caporetto is spelled with an A and Catherine Barkley as we finally agreed to spell her in the book is Katharine (as in Katharsis).

Could you send me proofs I corrected and sent back? If it's impossible I will write and try and get the other set of them from Cape [the British publisher]. Although I hate to write them for favors because I think I am *through* with them I hope to god for good. I'm disgusted with his [Jonathan Cape's] yellow deletions. They cut sentences out without a word to me and only sent me page proofs and wrote me on the 18th when going to America the 21st of Sept. What I want to do is to get them cut and bound up so I can have one copy of it as it was before the blanks.

Thornton Wilder said for me to write you that if you got in any trouble about the book or if they attacked it he would be glad to write or wire anything to help.

What I'm afraid of now that I've actually seen it is that in a little while it will all be over and when a respectable number are sold then it will be laid off being pushed and not sell any more and the book will be just the same only no one will ever buy it—I won't have another one for two years anyway.

I always figured that if I could write good books they would always sell a certain amount if they were good and some day I could live on what they all would bring in honestly. But Scott [F. Scott Fitzgerald] tells me that is all bunk. That a book only sells for a short time and that afterwards it never sells and that it doesn't pay the publishers even to bother with it. So I guess it's all just a damned racket like all the rest of it and the way I feel tonight is to hell with all of it. All I got out of this book is disappointment. I couldn't pay any attention when my father died. Couldn't let myself feel *anything* because I would get out of the book and lose it. Of course the thing as a serial supports them all and the book is going to have to too. But I would rather write and then go over it and when I know it's right stick to it and publish it that way the way it was if it never sells a damned one. That's what I should have done. Instead of starting in on the polite Owen Wister Compromise. The fact I do it on acct. of my family is no excuse and I know it. I'm a Professional Writer now—than which there isn't anything lower. I never thought I'd be it (and I'm damned if I'm going to do it any more). But if I can get one copy of it and I can see I got it set up the way it was (rather you set it up and deserve all credit) in type it will take some of the curse off it.

Don't think I'm sore at you—I'm not. You've *always* been grand to me. I just hate the whole damned thing. And the jacket and blurb on Julien Green's book by Harper's made me want to vomit. They said he was to be compared to Balzac, Flaubert, Dostoyevski, Emily Brontë, and Conrad. The one who compared him to Flaubert was Grant Overton who writes whole propaganda books for publishers. As much critical integrity as a crab between your dirty toes.

A $10,000 prize given to 2 women and 2 Fairies—the last two under contract already. How many books did Cummings' "Enormous Room" sell?

It's all a racket. Sometimes I wish to God you weren't my friend and instead I was with some firm I hated so I could put the screws on and ratchet them from the other side.

Anyway, I'll end this before it goes on any further. It's been raining all day—raining outside now. Haven't had a drink for a week. ♦

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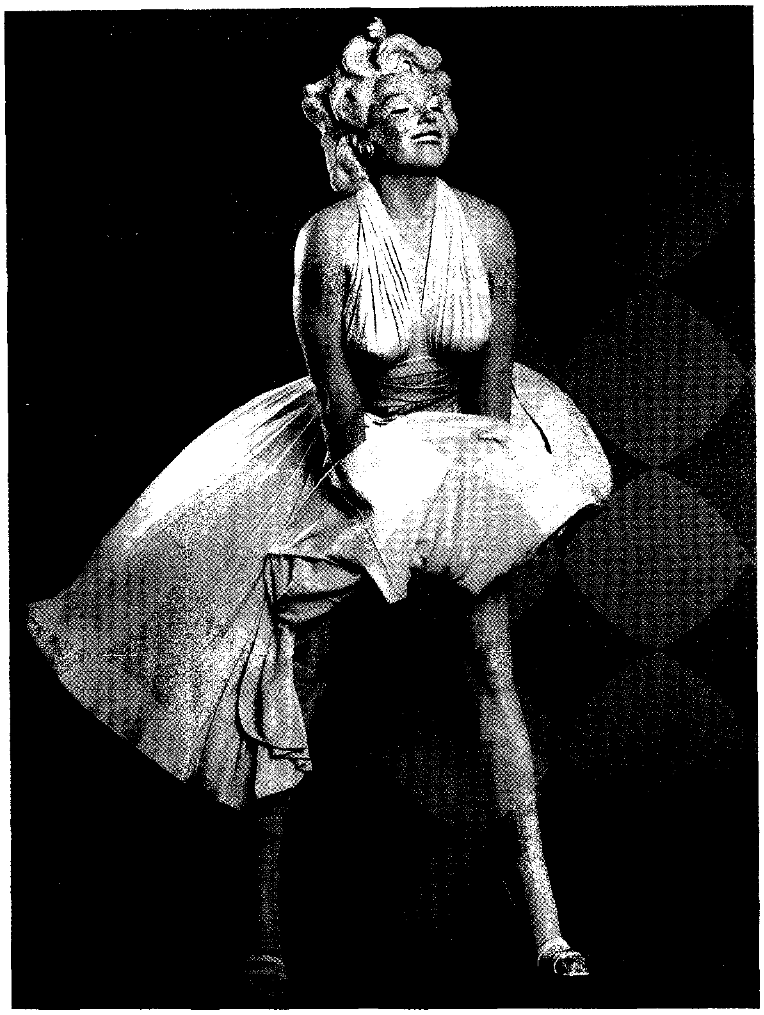

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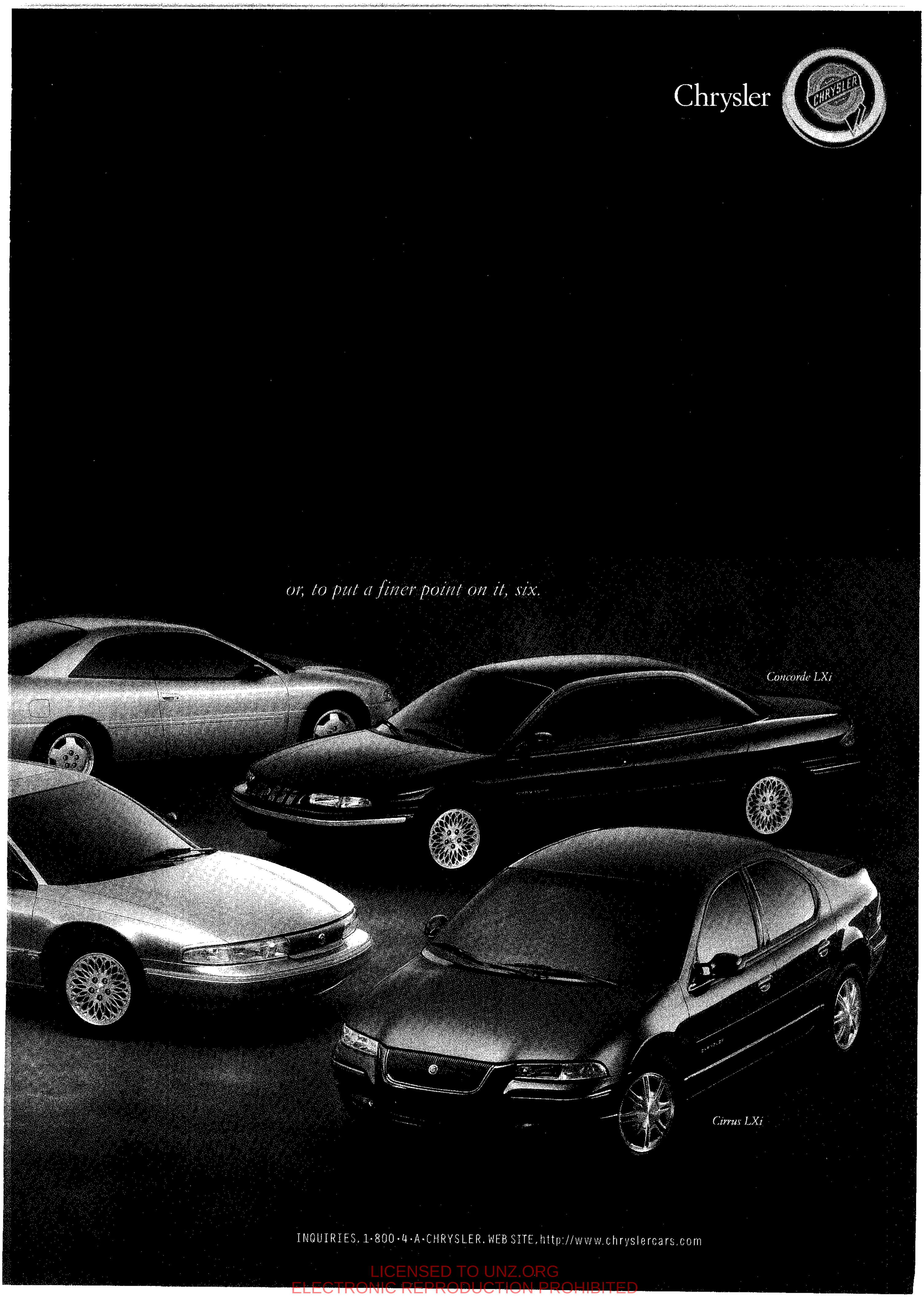
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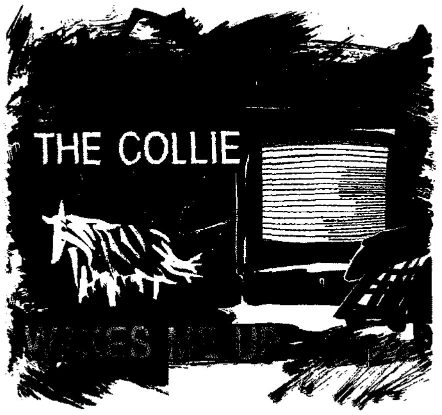
PERSONAL HISTORY

THE FOURTH STATE OF MATTER

A week in the author's life when it became impossible to control the course of events.

BY JO ANN BEARD



about three times a night, summoning me from a great distance as I row my boat through a dim, complicated dream. She's on the shoreline, barking. Wake up. She's staring at me with her head slightly tipped to the side, long nose, gazing eyes, toenails clenched to get a purchase on the wood floor. We used to call her the face of love.

She totters on her broomstick legs into the hallway and over the doorsill into the kitchen, makes a sharp left at the refrigerator—careful, almost went down—then a straightaway to the door. I sleep on my feet in the cold of the doorway, waiting. Here she comes. Lift her down the two steps. She pees and then stands, Lassie in a ratty coat, gazing out at the yard.

In the porch light the trees shiver, the squirrels turn over in their sleep. The Milky Way is a long smear on the sky, like something erased on a blackboard. Over the neighbor's house, Mars flashes white, then red, then white again. Jupiter is hidden among the anonymous blinks and glitterings. It has a moon with sulfur-spewing volcanoes and a beautiful name: Io. I learned it at work, from the group of men who surround me there. Space physicists, guys who spend days on end with their heads poked through the fabric of the sky, listening to the sounds of the universe. Guys whose own lives are ticking like alarm clocks getting ready to go off, although none of us are aware of it yet.

The dog turns and looks, waits to be carried up the two steps. Inside the house she drops like a shoe onto her blanket, a thud, an adjustment. I've climbed back under my covers already but her leg's stuck underneath her, we can't get comfortable. I fix the leg, she rolls over and sleeps. Two hours later I wake up and she's gazing at me in the darkness. The face of love. She wants to go out again. I give her a boost, balance her on her legs. Right on time: 3:40 A.M.

THERE are squirrels living in the spare bedroom upstairs. Three dogs also live in this house, but they were invited. I keep the door of the spare bedroom shut at all times, because of the squirrels and because that's where the vanished husband's belongings are stored. Two of the dogs—the smart little brown mutt and the Labrador—spend hours sitting patiently outside the door, waiting for it to be opened so they can dismantle the squirrels. The collie can no longer make it up the stairs, so she lies at the bottom and snores or stares in an interested manner at the furniture around her.

I can take almost anything at this point. For instance, that my vanished husband is neither here nor there; he's reduced himself to a troubled voice on the telephone three or four times a day.

Or that the dog at the bottom of the stairs keeps having mild strokes, which cause her to tilt her head inquisitively and also to fall over. She drinks prodigious amounts of water and pees great volumes onto the folded blankets where she sleeps. Each time this happens I stand her up, dry her off, put fresh blankets underneath her, carry the peed-on blankets down to the basement, stuff them into the washer and then into the dryer. By the time I bring them back upstairs they are

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VILLE ET VILLAGE

needed again. The first few times this happened, I found the dog trying to stand up, gazing with frantic concern at her own rear. I praised her and patted her head and gave her treats until she settled down. Now I know whenever it happens, because I hear her tail thumping against the floor in anticipation of reward. In retraining her I've somehow retrained myself, bustling cheerfully down to the basement, arms drenched in urine, the task of doing load after load of laundry strangely satisfying. She is Pavlov and I am her dog.

I'm fine about the vanished husband's boxes stored in the spare bedroom. For now, the boxes and the phone calls persuade me that things could turn around at any moment. The boxes are filled with thirteen years of his pack-ratness: statistics textbooks that still harbor an air of desperation; smarmy suit coats from the Goodwill; various old Halloween masks and one giant black papier-mâché thing he made that was supposed to be Elvis's hair but didn't turn out. A collection of ancient Rolling Stones T-shirts. You know he's turning over a new leaf when he leaves the Rolling Stones behind.

What I can't take is the squirrels. They come alive at night, throwing terrific parties in the spare bedroom, making thumps and crashes. Occasionally a high-pitched squeal is heard amid bumps and the sound of scrabbling toenails. I've begun sleeping downstairs, on the blue vinyl dog couch, the sheets slipping off, my skin stuck to the cushions. This is an affront to the two younger dogs, who know the couch belongs to them; as soon as I settle in they creep up and find their places between my knees and elbows.

I'm on the couch because the dog on the blanket gets worried at night. During the day she sleeps the catnappy sleep of the elderly, but when it gets dark her eyes open and she is agitated, trying to stand whenever I leave the room, settling down only when I'm next to her. We are in this together, the dying game, and I read for hours in the evening with one foot on her back, getting up only to open a new can of beer or take blankets to the basement. At some point I stretch out on the vinyl couch and close my eyes, one hand hanging down, touching her side. By morning the dog arm has become a nerveless club that doesn't come around until noon. My friends think I'm nuts.

One night, for hours, the dog won't lie down. I call my office pal, Mary, and wake her up. *"I'm weary,"* I say, in italics.

Mary listens, sympathetic, on the other end. "Oh my God," she finally says. "*What* are you going to do?"

I calm down immediately. "Exactly what I'm doing," I tell her. The dog finally parks herself with a thump on the stack of damp blankets. She sets her nose down and tips her eyes up to watch me. We all sleep then, for a bit, while the squirrels sort through the boxes overhead and the dog on the blanket keeps nervous watch.

I'VE called in tired to work. It's midmorning and I'm shuffling around in my long underwear, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. The whole house is bathed in sunlight and the faint odor of used diapers. The dogs are being mild-mannered and charming; I nudge the collie with my foot.

"Wake up and smell zee bacons," I say. She lifts her nose groggily and falls back asleep. I get ready for the office.

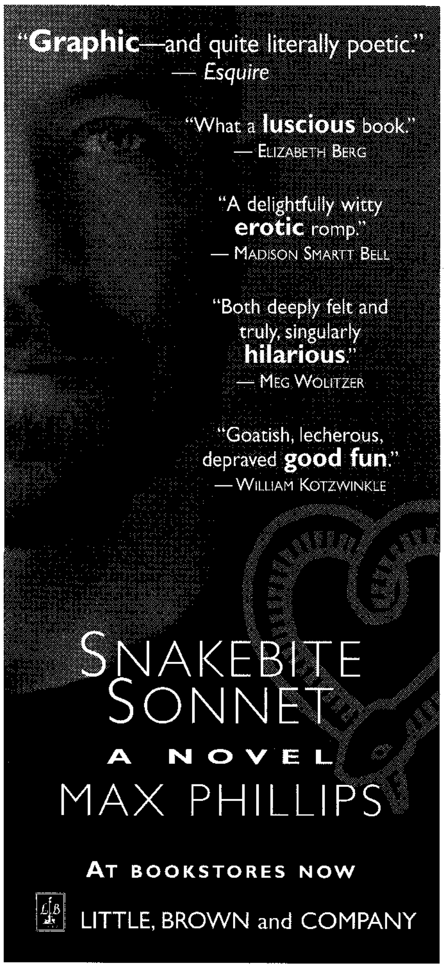
"I'm leaving and I'm never coming back," I say while putting on my coat. I use my mother's aggrieved, underappreciated tone. The little brown dog transfers her gaze from me to the table, the last place she remembers seeing toast. The Labrador, who understands English, begins howling miserably. She wins the toast sweepstakes and is chewing loudly when I leave, the little dog barking ferociously at her.

AT the office, there are three blinks on the answering machine, the first from a scientist who speaks very slowly, like a kindergarten teacher, asking about reprints. "What am I, the village idiot?" I ask the room, taking down his number in large backward characters. The second and third blinks are from my husband, the across-town apartment dweller.

The first of his calls makes my heart lurch in a hopeful way. "I have to talk to you right *now*," he says grimly. "Where *are* you? I can never find you."

"Try calling your own house," I say to the machine. In his second message he has composed himself.

"I'm *fine* now," he says firmly. "Dis-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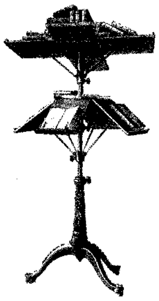

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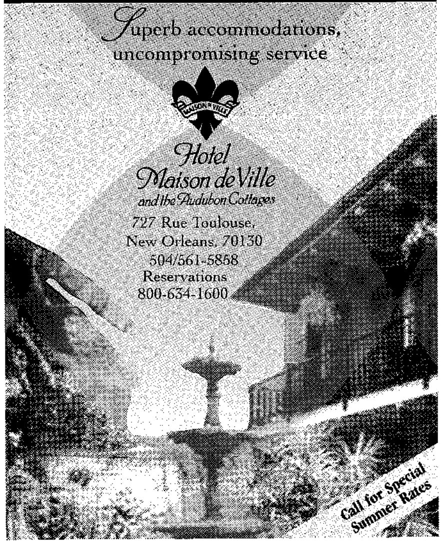
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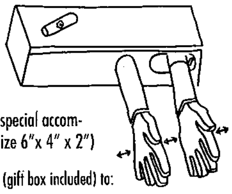
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regard previous message and don't call me back, please; I have meetings." Click, dial tone, rewind.

My leaping heart settles back into its hole in my chest. I say "Damn it" out loud, just as Chris strides into the office.

"What?" he asks defensively. He tries to think if he's done anything wrong recently. He checks the table for work; things are in good shape. A graduate student, Gang Lu, stops by to drop off some reports. Chris and I have a genial relationship these days, reading the paper together in the mornings, congratulating ourselves on each issue of the journal. It's a space-physics monthly, and he's the editor and I'm the managing editor. I know nothing about the science part; my job is to shepherd the manuscripts through the review process and create a journal out of the acceptable ones.

Christoph Goertz. He's hip in a professorial, cardigan/jeans kind of way. He's tall and lanky and white-haired, forty-seven years old, with an elegant trace of accent from his native Germany. He has a great dog, a giant black outlaw named Mica, who runs through the streets of Iowa City at night, inspecting garbage cans. She's big and friendly but a bad judge of character, and frequently runs right into the arms of the dogcatcher. Chris is always bailing her out.

"They don't understand dogs," he says.

I spend more time with Chris than I ever did with my husband. The morning I told him I was being dumped he was genuinely perplexed. "He's leaving *you*?" he asked.

Chris was drinking coffee, sitting at his table in front of the blackboard. Behind his head was a chalk drawing of a hip, professorial man holding a coffee cup. It was a collaborative effort; I had drawn the man and Chris framed him, using blue chalk and a straightedge. The two-dimensional man and the three-dimensional man stared at me intently.

"He's leaving *you*?" And for an instant I saw myself from their vantage point across the room—Jo Ann—and a small bubble of self-esteem percolated up from my depths. Chris shrugged. "You'll do fine," he said.

During my current turmoils I've come to think of work as my own kind of Zen practice, the constant barrage of paper hypnotic and soothing. Chris lets me work an eccentric schedule; in return I update his publications list for him and listen to stories about outer space.

Besides being an editor and a teacher, he's the head of a theoretical-plasma-physics team made up of graduate students and research scientists. He travels all over the world telling people about the magnetospheres of various planets, and when he comes back he brings me presents—a small bronze box from Africa with an alligator embossed on the top, a big piece of amber from Poland with the wings of flies preserved inside it, and, once, a set of delicate, horrifying bracelets made from the hide of an elephant.

Currently he is obsessed with the dust in the plasma of Saturn's rings. Plasma is the fourth state of matter. You've got your solid, your liquid, your gas, and then your plasma. In outer space there's the plasmasphere and the plasmapause. I avoid the math when I can and put a layperson's spin on these things.

"Plasma is blood," I told him.

"Exactly," he agreed, removing the comics page and handing it to me.

This is the kind of conversation we mostly have around the office, but today he's caught me at a weak moment, tucking my heart back inside my chest. I decide to be cavalier.

"I wish my *dog* was out tearing up the town and my *husband* was home sleeping on a blanket," I say.

Chris is neutral about my marriage problems, but he thinks the dog thing has gone far enough. "Why are you letting this go on?" he asks solemnly.

"I'm not *letting* it, that's why," I tell him. There are stacks of manuscripts everywhere and he has all the pens over on his side of the room. "It just *is*, is all. Throw me a pen." He does, I miss it, stoop to pick it up, and when I straighten up again I might be crying.

"You have control over this," he explains in his professor voice. "You can decide how long she suffers."

This makes my heart pound. Absolutely not, I cannot do it. And then

I weaken and say what I really want: for her to go to sleep and not wake up, just slip out of her skin and into the other world.

"Exactly," he says.

I HAVE an ex-beauty queen coming over to get rid of the squirrels for me. She has long red hair and a smile that can stop trucks. I've seen her wrestle goats, scare off a giant snake, and express a dog's anal glands, all in one afternoon. I told her on the phone that a family of squirrels is living in the upstairs of my house.

"They're making a monkey out of me," I said.

So Caroline climbs into her car and drives across half the state, pulls up in front of my house, and gets out carrying zucchini, cigarettes, and a pair of big leather gloves. I'm sitting outside with my old dog, who lurches to her feet, staggers three steps, sits down, and falls over. Caroline starts crying.

"Don't try to give me zucchini," I say.

We sit companionably on the front stoop for a while, staring at the dog and smoking cigarettes. One time I went to Caroline's house and she was nursing a dead cat that was still breathing. At some point that afternoon, I saw her spoon baby food into its mouth and as soon as she turned away the whole puréed mess plopped back out. A day later she took it to the vet and had it euthanized. I remind her of this.

"You'll do it when you do it," she says firmly.

I pick the collie up like a fifty-pound bag of sticks and feathers, stagger inside, place her on the damp blankets, and put the two other nutcases in the back yard. From upstairs comes a crash and a shriek. Caroline stares up at the ceiling.

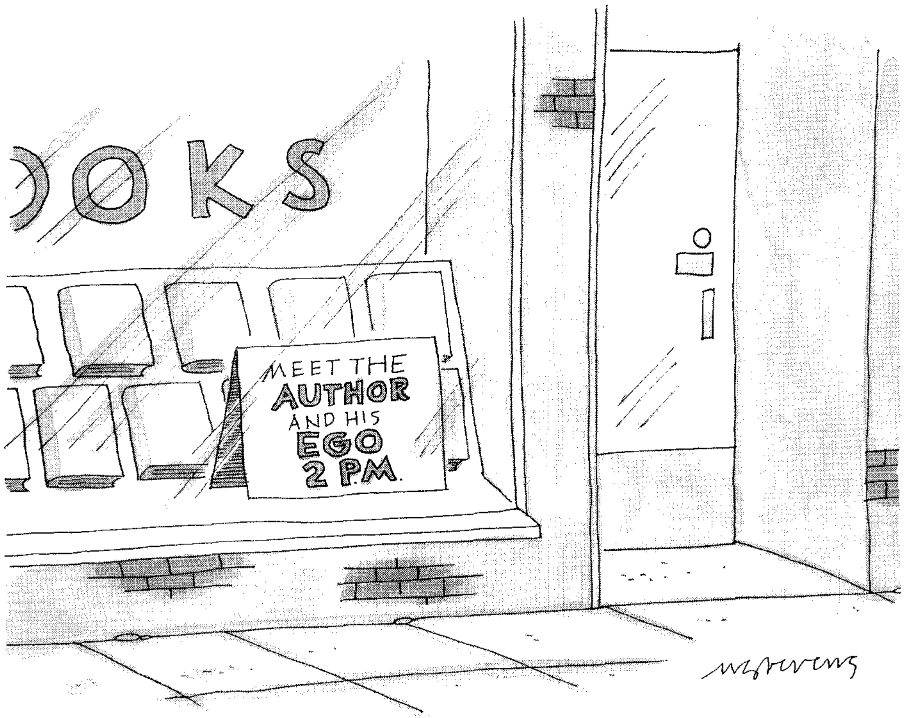
"It's like having the Wallendas stay at your house," I say cheerfully. All of a sudden I feel fond of the squirrels and fond of Caroline and fond of myself for heroically calling her to help me. The phone rings four times. It's the husband, and his voice over the answering machine sounds frantic. He pleads with whoever Jo Ann is to pick up the phone.

"Please? I think I might be freaking out," he says. "Am I ruining my life here, or what? Am I making a *mistake*? Jo?" He breathes raggedly and sniffs into the receiver for a moment, then hangs up with a muffled clatter.

Caroline stares at the machine as if it's a copperhead.

"Holy fuckoly," she says, shaking her head. "You're *living* with this crap?"

"He wants me to reassure him that he's strong enough to leave me," I tell her. "Else he won't have fun on his bike ride. And guess what? I'm too tired to." But now I can see him in his dank little apartment, wringing his hands and staring out the windows. In his rickety dresser is the new package



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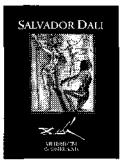

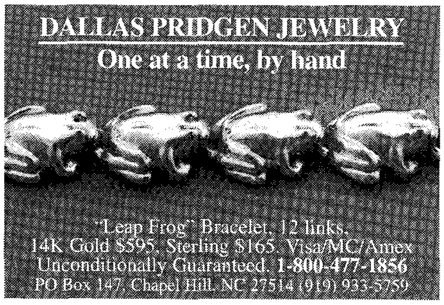

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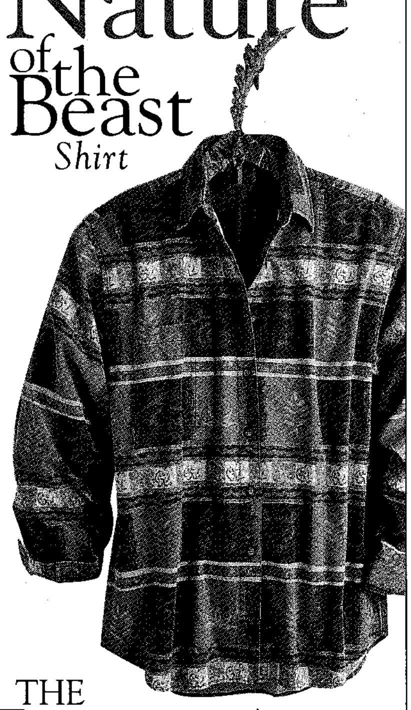

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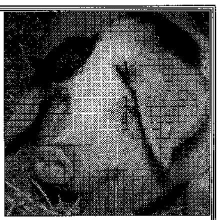

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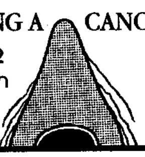

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of condoms he accidentally showed me last week.

Caroline lights another cigarette. The dog pees and thumps her tail.

I need to call him back because he's suffering.

"You call him back and I'm forced to kill you," Caroline says. She exhales smoke and points to the phone. "That is evil shit."

I tend to agree. It's blanket time. I roll the collie off onto the floor and put the fresh blankets down, roll her back. Caroline has put on the leather gloves, which go all the way to her elbows. She's staring at the ceiling with determination.

The plan is that I'm supposed to separate one squirrel from the herd and get it in a corner. Caroline will take it from there. But when I'm in the room with her and the squirrels are running around, all I can do is scream. I'm not afraid of them, but my screaming button is on and the only way to turn it off is to leave the room.

"How are you doing?" I ask from the other side of the door. I can hear Caroline crashing around and swearing. The door opens and she falls out into the hall, with a gray squirrel stuck to her glove. She clatters down the stairs and out the front door, and returns looking triumphant.

The collie appears at the foot of the stairs with her head cocked and her ears up. For an instant she looks like a puppy, then her feet start to slide. I run down and catch her and carry her upstairs so she can watch the show. The squirrels careen around the room, tearing the ancient wallpaper off the walls. The last one is a baby, so we keep it for a few minutes, looking at its little feet and its little tail. We show it to the collie, who stands up immediately and tries to get it.

Caroline patches the hole where they got in, cutting the wood with a power saw down in the basement. She comes up wearing a tool belt and lugging a ladder. I've seen a scrapbook of photos of her wearing evening gowns with a banner across her chest and a crown on her head. Curled hair, lipstick. She climbs down and puts the tools away. We eat nachos.

"I only make food that's boiled or melted these days," I tell her.

"I know," she replies.

The phone rings again, but whoever it is hangs up.

"Is it him?" she asks.

"Nope."

Caroline gestures toward the sleeping collie and remarks that it seems like just two days ago that she was a puppy.

"She was never a puppy," I tell her. "She's always been older than me."

When they say goodbye, Caroline holds the collie's long nose in one hand and kisses her on the forehead; the collie stares back at her gravely. Caroline is crying when she leaves, a combination of squirrel adrenaline and sadness. I cry, too, although I don't feel particularly bad about anything. I hand her the zucchini through the window and she pulls away from the curb.

The house is starting to get dark in that early-evening twilit way. I turn on lights and go upstairs. The black dog comes with me and circles the squirrel room, snorting loudly, nose to floor. There is a spot of turmoil in an open box—they made a nest in some disco shirts from the seventies. I suspect that's where the baby one slept. The mean landlady has evicted them.

Downstairs, I turn the lights back off and let evening have its way with me. Waves of pre-nighttime nervousness are coming from the collie's blanket. I sit next to her in the dimness, touching her ears, and listen for feet at the top of the stairs.

THEY'RE speaking in physics, so I'm left out of the conversation. Chris apologetically erases one of the pictures I've drawn on the blackboard and replaces it with a curving blue arrow surrounded by radiating chalk waves of green.

"If it's plasma, make it in red," I suggest. We're all smoking semi-illegally in the journal office with the door closed and the window open. We're having a plasma party.

"We aren't discussing *plasma*," Bob Smith says condescendingly. A stocky, short-tempered man, he's smoking a horrendously smelly pipe. The longer he stays in here the more it feels as if I'm breathing small daggers in through my nose. He and I don't get along; each of us thinks the other needs to be taken down a peg. Once we had a hissing match in the hallway which ended with him suggesting

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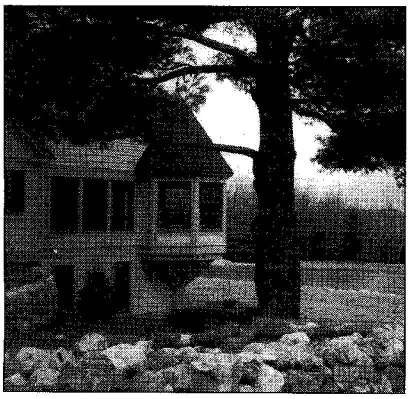

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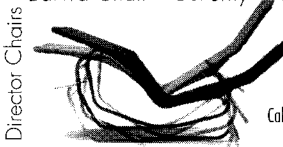

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that I could be fired, which drove me to tell him that he was *already* fired, and both of us stomped into our offices and slammed our doors.

"I had to fire Bob," I tell Chris later.

"I heard," he says. Bob is his best friend. They spend at least half of each day standing in front of blackboards, writing equations and arguing about outer space. Then they write theoretical papers about what they come up with. They're actually quite a big deal in the space-physics community, but around here they're just two guys who keep erasing my pictures.

Someone knocks on the door and we put our cigarettes out. Bob hides his pipe in the palm of his hand and opens the door.

It's Gang Lu, the doctoral student. Everyone lights up again. Gang Lu stands stiffly talking to Chris, while Bob holds a match to his pipe and puffs fiercely; nose daggers waft up and out, right in my direction. I give him a sugary smile and he gives me one back. Unimaginable, really, that less than two months from now one of his colleagues from abroad, a woman with delicate, birdlike features, will appear at the door to my office and identify herself as a friend of Bob's. When she asks, I take her down the hall to the room with the long table and then to his empty office. I do this without saying anything, because there's nothing to say, and she takes it all in with small, serious nods until the moment she sees his blackboard covered with scribbles and arrows and equations. At that point her face loosens and she starts to cry in long ragged sobs. An hour later I go back and the office is empty. When I erase the blackboard finally, I can see where she laid her hands carefully, where the numbers are ghostly and blurred.

Bob blows his smoke discreetly in my direction and waits for Chris to finish talking to Gang Lu, who is answering questions in a monotone—yes or no or I don't know. Another Chinese student, Linhua Shan, lets himself in after knocking lightly. He nods and smiles at me and then stands at a respectful distance, waiting to ask Chris a question.

It's like a physics conference in here. I wish they'd all leave so I can make my usual midafternoon spate of personal calls. I begin thumbing through papers in a businesslike way.

Bob pokes at his pipe with a paper clip. Linhua Shan yawns hugely and then looks embarrassed. Chris erases what he put on the blackboard and tries unsuccessfully to redraw my pecking parakeet. "I don't know how it goes," he says to me.

Gang Lu looks around the room with expressionless eyes. He's sick of physics and sick of the buffoons who practice it. The tall glacial German, Chris, who tells him what to do; the crass idiot Bob, who talks to him as if he is a dog; the student Shan, whose ideas about plasma physics are treated with reverence and praised at every meeting. The woman who puts her feet on the desk and dismisses him with her eyes. Gang Lu no longer spends his evenings in the computer lab down the hall, running simulations and thinking about magnetic forces and invisible particles; he now spends them at the firing range, learning to hit a moving target with the gun he purchased last spring. He pictures himself holding the gun with both hands, arms straight out and steady; Clint Eastwood, only smarter.

He stares at each person in turn, trying to gauge how much respect each of them has for him. One by one. Behind black-rimmed glasses, he counts with his eyes. In each case the verdict is clear: not enough.

THE collie fell down the basement stairs. I don't know if she was disoriented and was looking for me, or what. But when I was at work she used her long nose like a lever and got the door open and tried to go down there, except her legs wouldn't do it and she fell. I found her sleeping on the concrete floor in an unnatural position, one leg still awkwardly resting on the last step. I repositioned the leg and sat down and petted her. We used to play a game called Maserati, where I'd grab her long nose like a gearshift and put her through all the gears—first second third fourth—until we were going a hundred miles an hour through town. She thought it was funny.

Friday, I'm at work, but this morning there's not much to do, and every time I turn around I see her sprawled, eyes mute, leg bent upward. We're breaking each other's heart. I draw a picture of her on the blackboard using brown chalk. I make "X"s where her eyes should be. Chris walks in with the morning paper and a cup of coffee. He looks around the clean office.

"Why are you here when there's no work to do?" he asks.

"I'm hiding from my life, what else?" This sounds perfectly reasonable to him. He gives me part of the paper.

His mother is visiting from Germany; she's a robust woman of eighty who is depressed and hoping to be cheered up. In the last year she has lost her one-hundred-year-old mother and her husband of sixty years. She can't be really cheered up but she likes going to art galleries, so Chris has been driving her around the Midwest, to our best cities, showing her what kind of art Americans like to look at.

"How's your mom?" I ask him.

He shrugs and makes a flat-handed "so-so" motion.

We read, smoke, drink coffee, and yawn. I decide to go home.

"Good idea," he says.

It's November 1, 1991, the last day of the first part of my life. Before I leave I pick up the eraser and stand in front of the collie's picture on the blackboard, thinking. I can feel Chris watching me, drinking his coffee. His long legs are crossed, his eyes are mild. He has a wife named Ulrike, a daughter named Karein, and a son named Göran. A dog named Mica. A mother named Ursula. A friend named me.

I erase the "X"s.

Down the hall, Linhua Shan feeds numbers into a computer and watches as a graph is formed. The computer screen is brilliant blue, and the lines appear in red and yellow and green. Four keystrokes and the green becomes purple, the blue background fades to the azure of a summer sky. The wave lines arc over it, crossing against one another. He asks the computer to print, and while it chugs along he pulls up a golf game on the screen and tees off.

One room over, at a desk, Gang Lu works on a letter to his sister in China. *The study of physics is more and more disappointing*, he tells her. *Modern physics is self-delusion*, and *All my life I have been honest and straightforward, and I have most of all detested cunning, fawning sycophants and dishonest bureaucrats who think they are always right in everything.* Delicate Chinese characters all over a page. She was a kind and gentle sister, and he thanks her for that. He's going to kill himself. *You yourself should not be too sad about it, for at least I have found a few travelling companions to accompany me to the grave.* Inside the coat on the back of his chair are a .38-calibre handgun and a .22-calibre revolver. They're heavier than they look and weigh the pockets down. *My beloved second elder sister, I take my eternal leave of you.*

The collie's eyes are almond-shaped; I draw them in with brown chalk and put a white bone next to her feet.

"That's better," Chris says kindly.

Before I leave the building I pass Gang Lu in the hallway and say hello. He has a letter in his hand and he's wearing his coat. He doesn't answer, and I don't expect him to. At the end of the hallway are the double doors leading to the rest of my life. I push them open and walk through.

FRIDAY-AFTERNOON seminar, everyone is glazed over, listening as someone at the head of the long table explains something unexplainable. Gang Lu stands up and leaves the room abruptly; goes down one floor to see if the department chairman, Dwight, is sitting in his office. He is. The door is open. Gang Lu turns, walks back up the stairs, and enters the seminar room again. Chris Goertz is sitting near the door and takes the first bullet in the back of the head. There is a loud popping sound and then blue smoke. Linhua Shan gets the second bullet in the forehead; the lenses of his glasses shatter. More smoke and the room rings with the popping. Bob Smith tries to crawl beneath the table. Gang Lu takes two steps, holds his arms straight out, and levels the gun with both hands. Bob looks up. The third bullet in the right hand, the fourth in the chest. Smoke. Elbows and legs, people trying to get out of the way and then out of the room.

Gang Lu walks quickly down the stairs, expelling spent cartridges and loading new ones. From the doorway of Dwight's office: the fifth bullet in the head, the sixth strays, the seventh also in the head. A slumping. More smoke and ringing. Through the cloud an image comes to him—Bob Smith,

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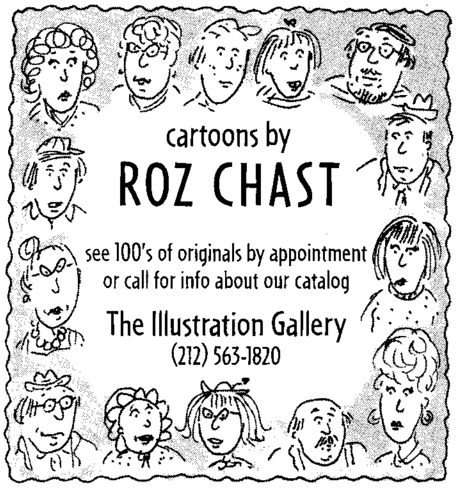

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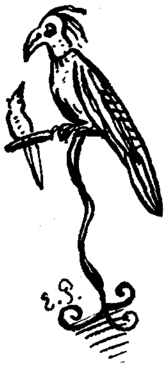
hit in the chest, hit in the hand, still alive. Back up the stairs. Two scientists, young men, crouch over Bob, loosening his clothes, talking to him. From where he lies, Bob can see his best friend still sitting upright in a chair, head thrown back at an unnatural angle. Everything is broken and red. The two young scientists leave the room at gunpoint. Bob closes his eyes. The eighth and ninth bullets in his head. As Bob dies, Chris Goertz's body settles in his chair, a long sigh escapes his throat. Reload. Two more for Chris, one for Linhua Shan. Exit the building, cross two streets and the green, into the second building and up the stairs.



The administrator, Anne Cleary, is summoned from her office by the receptionist. She speaks to him for a few minutes, he produces the gun and shoots her in the face. The receptionist, a young student working as a temp, is just beginning to stand when he shoots her. He expels the spent cartridges in the stairwell, loads new ones. Reaches the top of the steps, looks around. Is disoriented suddenly. The ringing and the smoke and the dissatisfaction of not checking all the names off the list. A slamming and a running sound, the shout of police. He walks into an empty conference room, takes off his coat, folds it carefully, and puts it over the back of a chair. Checks his watch: twelve minutes since it began. Places the barrel against his right temple. Fires.

THE first call comes at four o'clock. I'm reading on the bench in the kitchen, one foot on a sleeping dog's back. It's Mary, calling from work. There's been some kind of disturbance in the building, a rumor that Dwight was shot; cops are running through the halls carrying rifles. They're evacuating the building and she's coming over. Dwight, a tall likable oddball who cut off his ponytail when they made him chair of the department. Greets everyone with a famous booming hello in the morning; studies plasma, just like Chris and Bob. Chris lives two and a half blocks from the physics building; he'll be home by now if they've evacuated. I dial his house and his mother answers. She tells me that Chris won't be home until five, and then they're going to a play. Ulrike, her daughter-in-law, is coming back from a trip to Chicago and will join them. She wants to know why I'm looking for Chris—isn't he where I am?

No, I'm at home and I just had to ask him something. Could he please call me when he comes in.

She tells me that Chris showed her a drawing I made of him sitting at his desk behind a stack of manuscripts. She's so pleased to meet Chris's friends, and the Midwest is lovely, really, except it's very brown, isn't it?

It *is* very brown. We hang up. The Midwest is very brown. The phone rings. It's a physicist. His wife, a friend of mine, is on the extension. Well, he's not sure, but it's possible that I should brace myself for bad news. I've already heard, I tell him—something happened to Dwight. There's a long pause, and then his wife says, "Jo Ann. It's possible that Chris was involved."

I think she means Chris shot Dwight. "No," she says gently. "Killed, too."

Mary is here. I tell them not to worry and hang up. I have two cigarettes going. Mary takes one and smokes it. She's not looking at me. I tell her about the phone call.

"They're out of it," I say. "They thought Chris was involved."

She repeats what they said: "I think you should brace yourself for bad news." Pours whiskey into a coffee cup.

For a few minutes I can't sit down, I can't stand up. I can only smoke. The phone rings. Another physicist tells me there's some bad news. He mentions Chris and Bob and I tell him I don't want to talk right now. He says O.K. but to be prepared because it's going to be on the news any minute. It's four-forty-five.

"Now they're trying to stir Bob into the stew," I tell Mary. She nods; she's heard this, too. I have the distinct feeling there is something going on that I can either understand or not understand. There's a choice to be made.

"I don't understand," I tell Mary.

We sit in the darkening living room, smoking and sipping our cups of whiskey. Inside my head I keep thinking, Uh-oh, over and over. I'm rattled;

I can't calm down and figure this out.

"I think we should brace ourselves in case something bad has happened," I say to Mary. She nods. "Just in case. It won't hurt to be braced." I realize that I don't know what "braced" means. You hear it all the time but that doesn't mean it makes sense. Whiskey is supposed to be bracing but what it is is awful. I want either tea or beer, no whiskey. Mary nods again and heads into the kitchen.

Within an hour there are seven women in the dim living room, sitting. Switching back and forth between CNN and the local news reports. There is something terrifying about the quality of the light and the way voices are echoing in the room. The phone never stops ringing, ever since the story hit the national news. Physics, University of Iowa, dead people. Names not yet released. Everyone I've ever known is checking in to see if I'm still alive. California calls, New York calls, Florida calls, Ohio calls twice. My husband is having a party and all his guests call, one after another, to ask how I'm doing. Each time, fifty times, I think it might be Chris and then it isn't.

It occurs to me once that I could call his house and talk to him directly, find out exactly what happened. Fear that his mother would answer prevents me from doing it. By this time I am getting reconciled to the fact that Linhua Shan, Gang Lu, and Dwight Nicholson were killed. Also an administrator and her office assistant. The Channel 9 newswoman keeps saying there are five dead and two in critical condition. The names will be released at nine o'clock. Eventually I sacrifice all of them except Chris and Bob; *they* are the ones in critical condition, which is certainly not hopeless. At some point I go into the study to get away from the terrible dimness in the living room—all those eyes, all that calmness in the face of chaos. The collie tries to stand up, but someone stops her with a handful of Fritos.

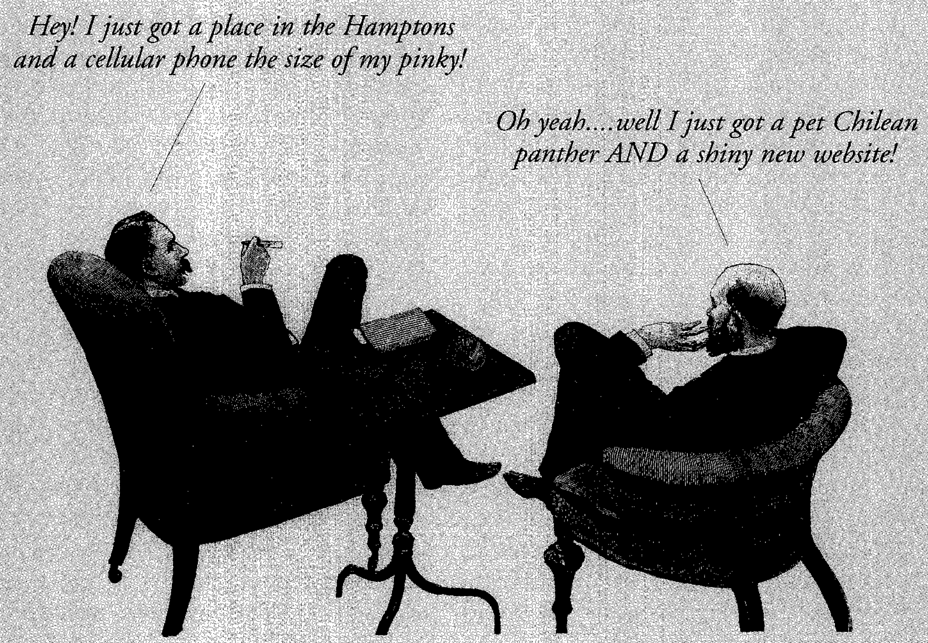
The study is small and cold after I shut the door, but more brightly lit than the living room. I can't remember what anything means. The phone rings and I pick up the extension and listen. My friend Michael is calling from Illinois for the second time. He asks Shirley if I'm holding up O.K. Shirley says it's hard to tell. I go back into the living room.

The newswoman breaks in at nine o'clock, and of course they drag it out as long as they can. I've already figured out that if they go in alphabetical order Chris will come first: Goertz, Lu, Nicholson, Shan, Smith. His name will come on first. She drones on, dead University of Iowa professors, lone gunman named Gang Lu.

Gang Lu. Lone gunman. Before I have a chance to absorb that, she says, The dead are.

Chris's picture.

Oh no, oh God. I lean against Mary's chair and then leave the room abruptly. I have to stand in the bathroom for a while and look at myself in the mirror. I'm still Jo Ann, white face and dark hair. I have earrings on, tiny wrenches that hang from wires. In the living room she's pronouncing all the other names. The two critically wounded are the administrator and her assistant, Miya Rodolfo-Sioson. The administrator is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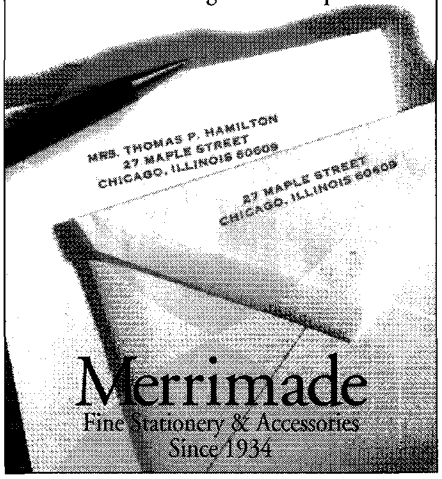

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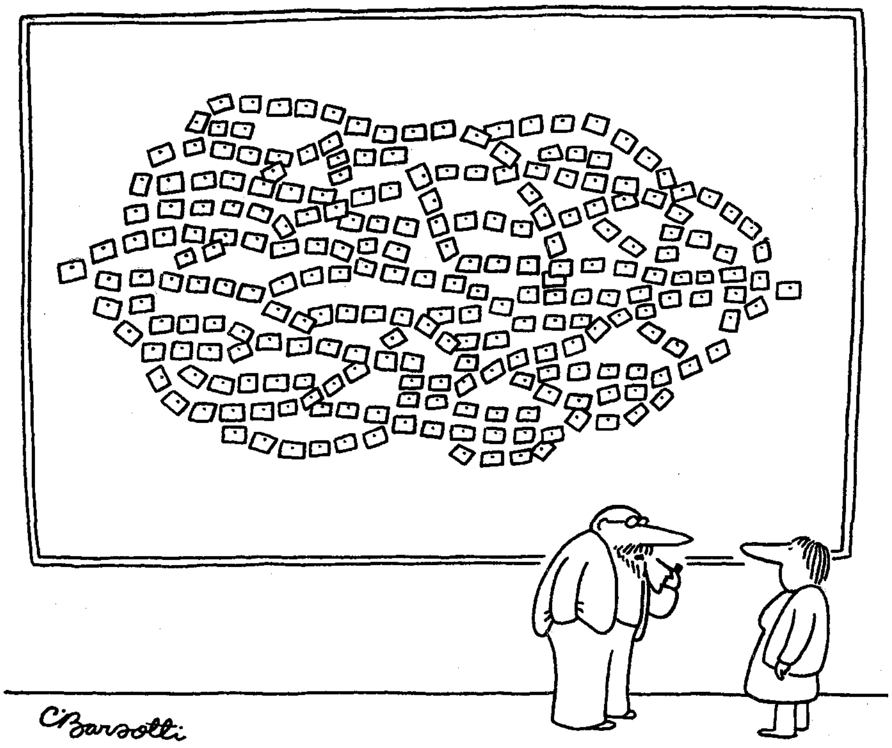

"It's plotted out. I just have to write it."

• •

already dead for all practical purposes, although they won't disconnect the machines until the following afternoon. The student receptionist will survive but will never again be able to move much more than her head. She was in Gang Lu's path and he shot her and the bullet lodged in the top of her spine and she will never dance or walk or spend a day alone. She got to keep her head but lost her body. The final victim is Chris's mother, who will weather it all with a dignified face and an erect spine, then return to Germany and kill herself without further words or fanfare.

I tell the white face in the mirror that Gang Lu did this, wrecked everything and murdered all those people. It seems as ludicrous as everything else. I can't get my mind to work right, I'm still operating on yesterday's facts; today hasn't jelled yet. "It's a good thing none of this happened," I say to my face. A knock on the door, and I open it.

Julene's hesitant face. "She wanted to come visit you," she tells me. I bring the collie in and close the door. We sit by the tub. She lifts her long nose to my face and I take her muzzle and we move through the gears slowly—first second third fourth—all the way through town, until what happened has happened and we know it has happened. We return to the living room. The second wave of calls is starting to come in, from people who just saw the faces on the news. Shirley screens. A knock comes on the door. Julene settles the dog down again on her blanket. It's the husband at the door, looking distraught. He hugs me hard, but I'm made of cement, arms stuck in a down position.

The women immediately clear out, taking their leave, looking at the floor. Suddenly it's only me and him, sitting in our living room on a Friday night, just like always. I realize it took courage for him to come to the house when he did, facing all those women who think he's the Antichrist. The dogs are crowded against him on the couch and he's wearing a shirt I've never seen before. He's here to help me get through this. Me. He knows how awful this must be. Awful. He knows how I felt about Chris. Past tense. I have to put my hands over my face for a minute.

We sit silently in our living room. He watches the mute television screen and I watch him. The planes and ridges of his face are more familiar to me than my own. I understand that he wishes even more than I do that he still loved me. When he looks over at me, it's with an expression I've seen before. It's the way he looks at the dog on the blanket.

I get his coat and follow him out into the cold November night. There are stars and stars and stars. The sky is full of dead men, drifting in the blackness like helium balloons. My mother floats past in a hospital gown, trailing tubes. I go back inside where the heat is.

The house is empty and dim, full of dogs and cigarette butts. The collie has peed again. The television is flickering "Special Report" across the screen and I turn it off before the pictures appear. I bring blankets up, fresh and warm from the dryer.

After all the commotion the living room feels cavernous and dead. A branch scrapes against the house, and for a brief instant I feel a surge of hope. They might have come back. And I stand at the foot of the stairs staring up into the darkness, listening for the sounds of their little squirrel feet. Silence. No matter how much you miss them. They never come back once they're gone.

I WAKE her up three times between midnight and dawn. She doesn't usually sleep this soundly, but all the chaos and company in the house tonight have made her more tired than usual. The Lab wakes and drowsily begins licking her lower region. She stops and stares at me, trying to make out my face in the dark, then gives up and sleeps. The brown dog is flat on her back with her paws limp, wedged between me and the back of the couch.

I've propped myself so I'll be able to see when dawn starts to arrive. For now there are still planets and stars. Above the black branches of a maple is the Dog Star, Sirius, my personal favorite. The dusty rings of Saturn. Io, Jupiter's moon.

When I think I can't bear it for one more minute I reach down and nudge her gently with my dog arm. She rises slowly, faltering, and stands over me in the darkness. My peer, my colleague. In a few hours the world will resume itself, but for now we're in a pocket of silence. We're in the plasmapause, a place of equilibrium, where the forces of the earth meet the forces of the sun. I imagine it as a place of stillness, where the particles of dust stop spinning and hang motionless in deep space.

Around my neck is the stone he brought me from Poland. I hold it out. *Like this?* I ask. Shards of fly wings, suspended in amber.

Exactly, he says. ◆

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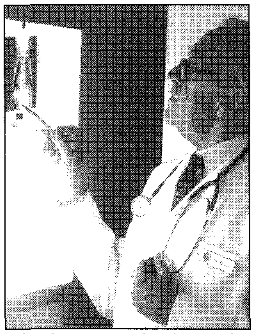

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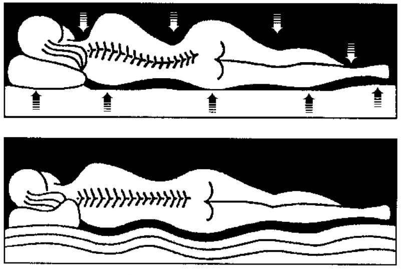

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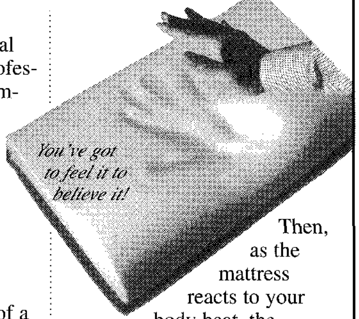

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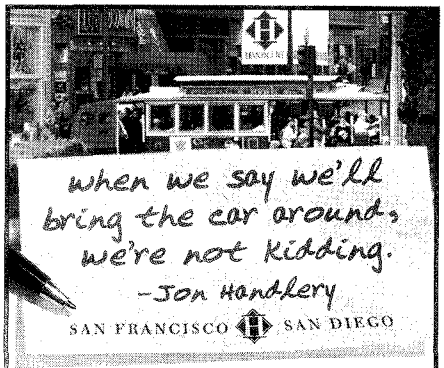

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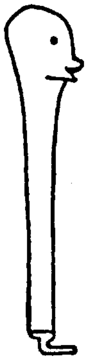

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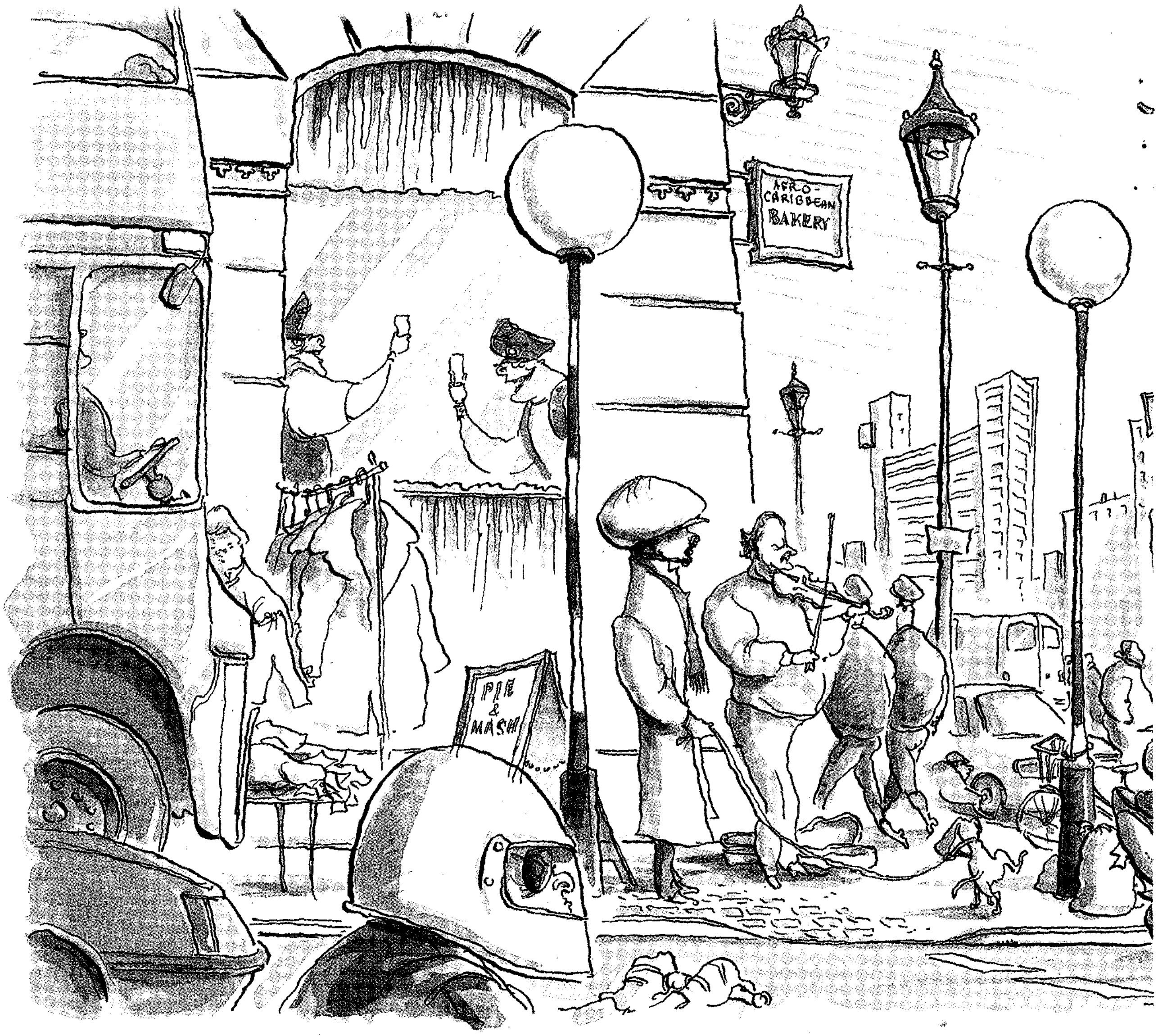


MICHAEL WITTE

FICTION

STATE OF ENGLAND

Bad food, bad breath, bad sex, bad health, and really bad politics. It's England, innit?

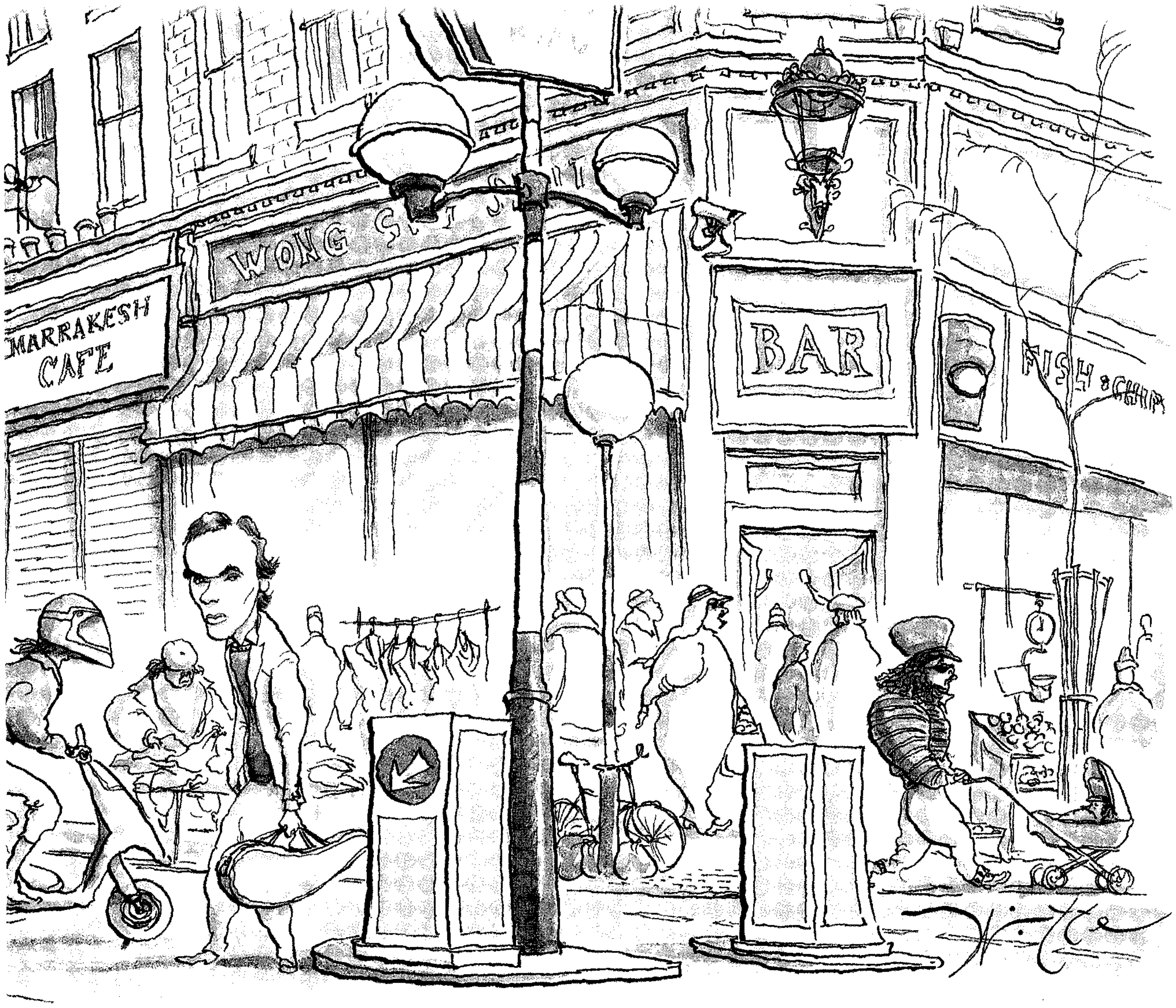
BY MARTIN AMIS

1. MOBILE PHONES

BIG MAL stood there on the running track in his crinkly linen suit, with a cigarette in one mitt and a mobile phone in the other. He also bore a wound, did the big man: a shocking laceration on the side of his face, earlobe to cheekbone. The worst thing about his wound was how *recent* it looked. It wasn't bleeding. But it might have been seeping. He'd got his suit from Contemporary Male in Culver City, Los Angeles—five years ago. He'd got his wound from a medium-rise car park off Leicester Square, London—last night. Under high flat-bottomed clouds and a shrill blue sky Big Mal stood there on the running track. Not tall but built like a brick khazi: five feet nine in all directions. . . . Mal felt he was in a classic situation: wife, child, other woman. It was mid-September. It was Sports Day. The running track he was strolling along would soon be pounded in earnest by his nine-year-old son, little Jet. Jet's mother, Sheilagh, was on the clubhouse steps, fifty yards away, with the other mums. Mal could see her. She too wielded a cigarette and a mobile phone. They weren't talking, except on their mobile phones.

He put the cigarette in his mouth and, with big, white, cold, agitated fingers, prodded out her number.

"A!" he said. A tight sound, sharply pitched—the short "a," as in "Mal." It was a sound Mal made a lot: his general re-



sponse to pain, to inadvertency, to terrestrial imperfection. He went "*A!*" this time because he had jammed his mobile into the wrong ear. The sore one: so swollen, so richly traumatized by the events of the night before. Then he said, "It's me."

"Yeah, I can see you."

Sheilagh was moving away from the clump of mums, down the steps, toward him. He turned his back on her and said, "Where's Jet?"

"They come up on the bus. Christ, Mal, whatever have you done to yourself? The state of your face."

Well that was nice to know: that his wound was visible from fifty yards. "Load of ballocks," he said, by way of explanation. And it was true in a sense. Mal was forty-eight years old, and you could say he'd made a pretty good living from his fists: his fists, his toe caps, his veering, butting brow. Last night's spanking was by no means the worst he'd ever taken. But it was definitely the weirdest. "Hang about," he said, while he lit another cigarette. "*A!*" he added. Wrong ear again. "When's the bus due?"

"Have you had that looked at? You want to get that sorted."

"It was dressed," said Mal carefully, "by a trained nurse."

"Who's that then? Miss India? What she call herself? *Linzi* . . ."

"Oi. Not Linzi. Yvonne."

The mention of this name (wearily yet powerfully stressed on the first syllable) would tell Sheilagh its own story.

"Don't tell me. You were out rucking with Fat Lol. Yeah. Well. If you've been with Fat Lol for thirty years . . ."

Mal followed her line of reasoning. Been with Fat Lol for thirty years and you knew your first aid. You were a trained nurse whether you liked it or not. "Yvonne sorted it," he went on. "She cleaned it out and bunged some stuff on it." This was no less than the truth. That morning, over tea and toast, Yvonne had scalded his cheek with Fat Lol's aftershave and then dressed it with a section of kitchen roll. But the section of kitchen roll had long since disappeared into the wound's gurgling depths. It was like that film with the young Steve McQueen. Oh, yeah: "The Blob."

"Does it throb?"

"Yeah," said Mal resignedly, "it throbs. Look. Let's try and be civilized in front of the kid, O.K.? Come on now, She. We owe it to Jet. Right?"

"Right."

"Right. Now give me my fucking money."

"*Whoff* fucking money?"

"Whoff fucking money? *My* fucking money."

She hung up and so, unsuccessfully (and murmuring, "Where are you mate?"), he tried Fat Lol—tried Fat Lol on *his* mobile.

Moving in a broad arc, maintaining a fixed distance from his wife, Mal trudged along the track and then closed in on the far end of the clubhouse. The clubhouse with its black Tudor wood: maybe they had a bar in there. Mal hesitated, and even staggered; the coil, the spring in the person was winding down awful low. And here were all the other dads, on the steps round the side, with *their* mobiles.

Delaying his approach, Mal tarried on the verge and tried Linzi on *her* mobile.

JET'S school, St. Anthony's, was a smart one, or at least an expensive one. Mal it was who somehow met the startling fees. And showed up on days like today, as you had to do. He also expected his boy to perform well.

During his earliest visits to the parent-teacher interface, Mal had been largely speechless with peer-group hypochondria: he kept thinking there was something terribly wrong with him. He wanted out of that peer group and into a different peer group with weaker opposition. Mal made She do all the talking, with her greater confidence and higher self-esteem—deriving, as their marriage counsellor had once phrased it, from her "more advanced literacy skills." In truth, Mal's writing left much to be desired, to put it mildly. Not what you'd call overly clever on the reading, neither. Either. Confronted, say, by a billboard or the instructions on a Band-Aid tin, his lips moved, tremulously, miming his difficulty. He spoke bad, too—he knew it. But all that prejudice against people such as himself was gone now. Or so they said. And maybe they were partly right. Mal could go to virtually any restaurant he liked, and sit there surrounded by all these types squawking and honking away, and pick up a tab as dear as an air ticket. He could go to this or that place. And yet nobody could guarantee that he would *feel O.K.* in this or that place. Nobody could guarantee that, ever. Big Mal, who grunted with a kind of assent when he saw a swung fist coming for his mouth, could nonetheless be laid out by the sight of a cocked pinkie. *A!* Always it was with him, every hour, like an illness, like a haunting. Go on then—stare. Go on then: laugh. Why else d'you think he'd loved the States so much? L.A., mate: working for Joseph Andrews . . .

Mal felt he was a man in a classic situation. He had run away from home (five months ago) and moved in with a younger woman (Linzi), abandoning his wife (Sheilagh) and his child (little Jet). A classic situation is, by definition, a second-hand situation—third-hand, eleventh-hand. And more and more obviously so, as the aggregate climbed. Late at night, Mal sometimes found himself thinking, If Adam had left Eve, and run off with a younger woman—supposing he could find one—he'd have been stepping into the entirely unknown. Call Adam a cunt, but you couldn't call him corny. Now all that was just routine: stock, stale, dead. And nowadays too there was this other level of known ground. You'd picked up some information from all the studies and the stats: and there you were on TV every night, in the soaps and the sitcoms, generally being played for laughs. One out of two did it: left home. Of course, *not* leaving home was corny, too, but nobody ever went on about that. And Adam, by sticking around, remained in the entirely unknown.

He sensed he was a cliché—and sensed further that he'd even fucked *that* up. Let's think. *He ran away from home and moved in with a younger woman.* Ran away? Linzi only lived across the street. Moved in? He was at a bed-and-breakfast in King's Cross. A younger woman? Mal was getting surer and surer that Linzi was, in fact, an *older* woman. One afternoon, while she was enjoying a drugged nap, Mal had come across her passport. Linzi's date of birth was given as "25 Aug 19 . . ." The last two digits had been scratched out, with a fingernail. Under the angle lamp you could still see a dot of nail polish—the same vampiric crimson she often used. Opposite, staring at him, was Linzi's face: delusions of grandeur in a Woolworth photo booth. All he knew for certain was that Linzi had been born this century.

A! Wrong ear again. But he *wanted* the wrong ear, this time. For now he was about to join the dads—the peer group; and Mal's mobile would help conceal his wound. Mobiles meant social mobility. With a mobile riding on your jaw you could enter the arena enclosed in your own concerns, your own preoccupation, your own business. "Cheers, lads," he said, with a wave, and then frowned into his phone. He'd called Linzi, and was therefore saying things like "Did you, babes? . . . Have a cup of tea and a Nurofen. . . . Go back to bed. With them brochures . . . They the Curvilinear or the Crescent? . . . Are you, darling?" Hunched over his mobile, his knees bent, Mal looked like a man awaiting his moment in the shot put. He was doing what all the other dads were doing, which was putting in an appearance. Presenting an appearance to one another and to the world. And what did Mal's appearance say? With fights and fighting, this was ancient knowledge. When you received a wound, you didn't just have to take it, sustain it. You didn't just have to bear it. You also had to wear it, for all to see, until it healed.

Nodding, winking, grasping an arm or patting a shoulder here and there, he moved among them. Blazers, shell suits, jeans, and open shirts, even the odd dhoti or kaftan or whatever you like to call them. The dads: half of them weren't even English—thus falling at the first hurdle, socially. Or so Mal might once have thought. "Manjeet, mate," he was saying. "Mikio. Nusrat!" Socially, these days, even the Pakkis could put the wind up him. Paratosh, for instance, who was some kind of Sikh or Pathan and wore a cravat and acted in radio plays and had beautiful manners. And if I can tell he's got beautiful manners, thought Mal, then they must be really ace. "Paratosh, mate!" he now cried. . . . But Paratosh just gave him a flat smile and minutely re-angled his stately gaze. It seemed to Mal that they were all doing that. Adrian. Fardous. Why? Was it the wound? He thought not. See, these were the nuclear dads, the ones who'd stuck with their families, so far, anyway. And everybody knew that Mal had broken out, had reneged on the treaty and gone non-nuclear. These men, some of them, were the husbands of Sheilagh's friends. Clumping and stamping around among them (and trying Fat Lol again now), Mal felt ancient censures ranged against him in these faces of ochre and hazel, of mocha and java. He was pariah, caste polluter; and he thought they thought he had failed, as a man. Awkward, massively cuboid, flinching under a thin swipe of dark hair, his fingers hovering over the contours of his damaged cheek, Mal was untouchable, like his wound.

Other dads talked on mobiles, their conversations disembodied, one-way. For a moment they sounded insane, like all the monologuists and soliloquizers of the city streets.

2. ASIAN BABES

LINZI'S real name was Shinsala, and her family came from Bombay, once upon a time. You wouldn't guess any of this, talking to her on the phone. Most of the foreign dads—the Nusrats, the Fardouses, the Paratoshes—spoke better English than Mal. Much better English. While presumably also being pretty good at Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, or whatever. And he had to wonder: how could that be? How come there was so little *left over* for Mal? Linzi, on the other hand, prompted no such reproaches. She spoke worse than Sheilagh, worse than Mal. She spoke as bad as Fat Lol. She spoke straight East End, with only this one little exoticism, in the way she handled her pronouns. Linzi said *he* where an English person would say *him* or *his*. Like "compared to he." Or "driving he car." Same with *she*. Like "the way she wears she skirts." Or "I hate she." It sometimes gave Mal a fright, because he thought she was talking about She. Sheilagh. And Linzi was always threatening a confrontation with She: like today, for instance. Mal didn't want to think about those two getting together. *A!*

But now the big man was shouldering his way indoors. He passed a Coke machine, bulletin boards, the entrance to the changing rooms, a snack hatch and its hamburger breath. Jesus. Mal wasn't a big boozer, like some. But last night, after the smacking they'd taken, he and Fat Lol had got through a bottle of Scotch. A bottle of Scotch *each*. So he now had the notion that after a couple of pints he'd feel twice the price. He peered round a corner, paused, and then strode forward, jangling his change. Everything in him responded to what he saw: the fruit machine, the charity jar full of brown coins, the damp gray rags beneath the wok-sized ashtrays, the upended liquor bottles with their optics on the nozzles, guaranteeing fair trading, guaranteeing fair play. And here was the ornately affable barman, plodding up through the floor.

"Mal!"

He turned. "Bern, mate!"

"All right?"

"All right? How's little Clint?"

"He's a terror. How's . . . ?"

"Jet? He's handsome."

"Here, Mal. Say hi to Toshiko."

Toshiko smiled with her Japanese teeth.

"Nice to meet you," said Mal, and added, uncertainly, helplessly, "I'm sure."

"I heard an interesting thing the other night," Bern was suddenly saying. Bern was a photographer, originally fashion but now glamour and social. He spoke worse than Mal. "A very interesting thing. I was covering the mayor's do. Got talking to these, uh, detectives. Scotland Yard. Remember that bloke who broke into Buckingham Palace? Caused all that fuss?"

Mal nodded. He remembered.

"Well guess what." And here Bern's face went all solemn and priestly. "They reckon he fucked her. Reckon he gave her one."

"Who?"

"The Queen. Remember he was found in her bedroom, right?"

"Right."

"Well these blokes reckon he fucked her."

"Phew, that's a bit steep, innit, mate?"

"Yeah well that's what they reckon. So you uh—you moved out."

"Yeah, mate. Couldn't hack it."

"Because every man has a . . ."

"His limit."

"Right. I mean, how much shit can you take, right?"

"Right."

It was good, talking to Bern like this. Get it off your chest. Bern had left home while his wife was *pregnant* with little Clint. Not for this Toshiko, who was presumably Japanese, but for somebody else. Every time Mal bumped into him, Bern had some new sort on his arm: foreign, thirtyish. As if doing it country by country. To keep himself young.

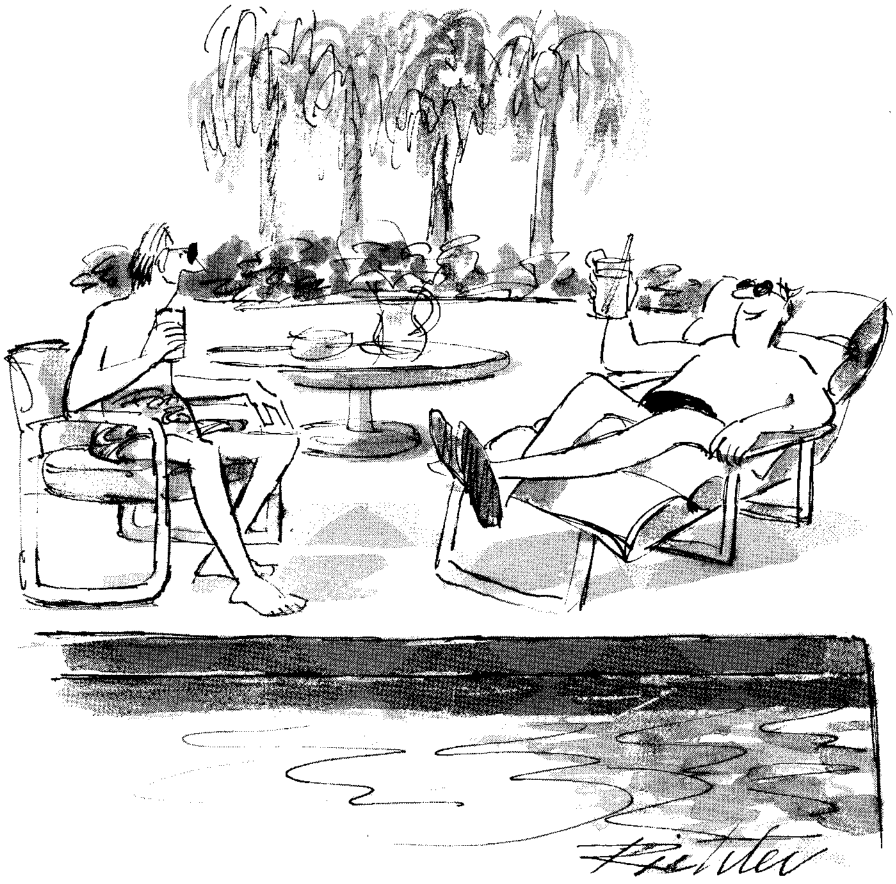
"Look at this one," said Bern. "Twenty-eight. You know something? She's me first Nip. Ain't you, Tosh! Where they been all my life?" Without lowering his voice or changing his tone, he said, "You know, I always thought they're built sideways. Down there. But they ain't. Same as all the others the world over. God bless 'em.

"She don't speak English, do you, Tosh?" continued Bern, putting Mal's mind at rest.

Toshiko quacked something back at him.

"Can speak French."

Mal lowered his gaze. The thing was . . . The big thing with Mal was that his sexuality, like his sociality, was essentially sombre. As if everything had gone wrong forty years ago, some rainy Saturday, when he stared in through department-store windows at fawn, dun, taut, waxy, plastic women, their arms raised in postures of gift-bearing or patient explication . . . In bed together, he and Linzi—Big Mal and Shinsala—watched "Asian Babes." By now their whole sex life was based on it. "Asian Babes," the magazine, the video, the laser CD, or whatever: "Asian Babes," Mal had a hunch, represented a milestone in race relations on this island. White men and dark women were coming together in electronic miscegenation. Every video wanker in England had now had his Fatima, his Fetnab. When "Asian



"I'm perfectly willing to suffer the slings and arrows as long as I can keep the outrageous fortune."

Babes" was taking a rest, or when they were button-punching their way through it, and Linzi's set was in neutral, the channel of choice was Zee TV—Indian musicals. And such a chaste culture! When a couple went to kiss, the camera would whip away to twirling, twittering lovebirds or great seas attacking a cliff face. Women of darkly heavenly beauty, laughing, singing, dancing, pouting, but above all weeping, weeping, weeping: milked of huge, glutinous, opalescent tears, on mountaintops, on street corners, under stage moons. Then Linzi would press the "Play" button and you'd be back with some Arab bint, smiling, chortling, and taking her clothes off to slinky music in some Arab flat at once modern and mosquelike and contorting herself on a polythene-covered settee or an ankle-deep white carpet. . . . The other video they kept watching was the one Linzi had procured from Kosmetique. Breast enhancement: Before and After. You could tell that plastic surgery sought to reverse natural prescript, because After was always better than Before, instead of a poor second, as in life. Although Mal liked Linzi as she was, he was nonetheless dead keen on Kosmetique, and this troubled him. But he too wanted to switch his skin. One time, at Speakers' Corner, where men on milk crates had one-way conversations with no visible audience, he had stood with a hand on Linzi's shoulder, staring at the fantastic shoeshine of her hair, and he had felt wonderfully evolved, like a racial rainbow, ready to encompass a new world. He wanted a change. This thing, he thought, this whole thing happened because he wanted a change. He wanted a change, and England wasn't going to give him one.

"Who you with now, then?" Bern asked him.

"Linzi. Nuts about her."

"Ah. Sweet. How old?"

He thought of saying, "Fortyish." Yeah: forty-*nine*. Or why not just say, "Sixteen"? Mal was feeling particularly grateful to Bern—for not saying anything about the state of his face. Well, that was Bern for you: a man of the world. Still, Mal felt unable to answer, and Bern soon started talking about the mysterious disappearance of the man who fucked the Queen (or so they reckoned). Toshiko stood there, smiling, her teeth strangely stacked. Mal had been in her company for half an hour and she still looked wholly terrifying to him, like something out of an old war comic. The extra cladding of the facial

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SHOWCASE BY
ULRIKE SCHAMONI

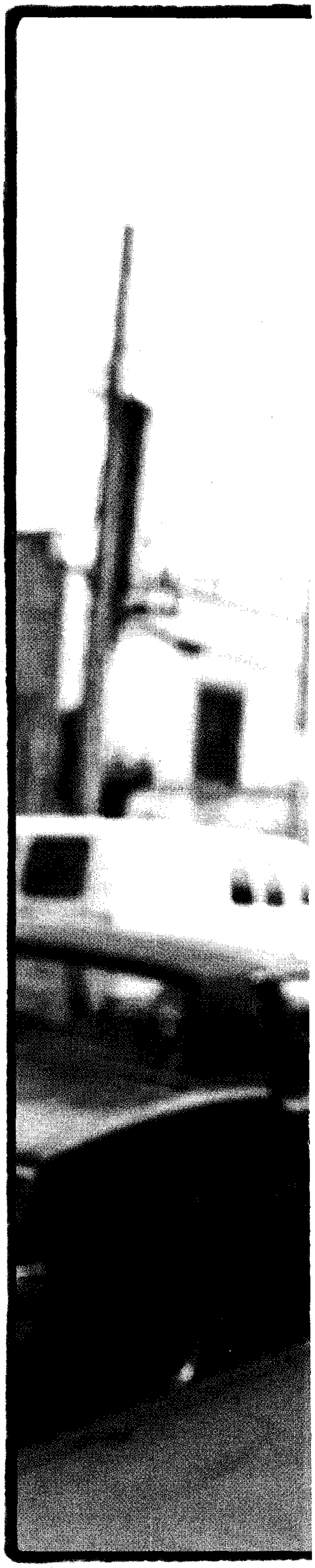
TWISTED

DONALD ANTRIM is two-thirds through completing a trilogy of short, elegant, outrageously imagined comic novels. The first, "Elect Mr. Robinson for a Better World," is told by a third-grade schoolteacher and amateur historian of the Inquisition, and describes clan warfare in a fortified neighborhood where taxpayers have recently drawn and quartered the town's ex-mayor, using (at the narrator's suggestion) a fleet of cars "in lieu of horses." The voice is the book's grand achievement: it's as calm and methodical as an operating manual for the iron maiden, and spiked with the same sexual menace.

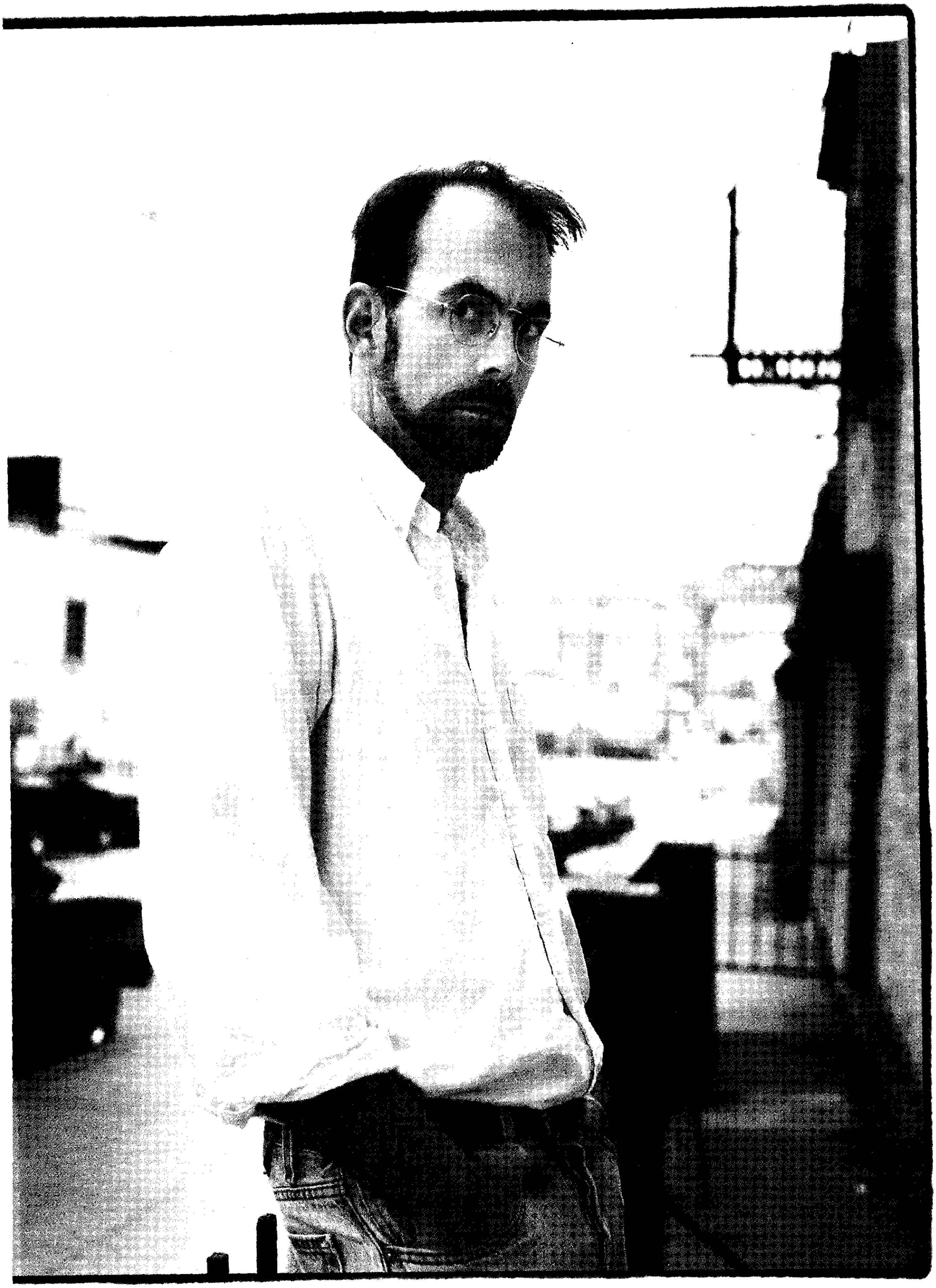
The second volume of the trilogy, "The Hundred Brothers," which will be published in January, presents us with another scrupulously insane narrator, one of the multitudinous brothers of the title, who gather in a crumbling mansion one winter evening to settle their differences and search for the lost urn containing their patriarch's ashes. Among them are "recovering addict Clayton" and "Pierce, the designer of radically unbuildable buildings," and, of course, " 'perfect' brother, Benedict, recipient of a medal of honor from the Academy of Sciences for work over twenty years in chemical transmission of 'sexual language' in eleven types of social insects."

Mr. Antrim is just now beginning "The Verificationist," the last installment of his trilogy, which means he's visible again. He tends to disappear when he's finishing something. With his first book, he pasted all one hundred and seventy-eight manuscript pages to the walls of his apartment, so that he could literally live inside his book. Then he wandered the dim rooms for weeks, making small corrections. Brushing his teeth, he'd change "palm-covered" to "palm-shrouded." In the morning, he'd change it back. Such maniacal, punctilious traits bring to mind Mr. Antrim's own narrators, whom he exaggerates into such hilarious existence.

—JEFFREY EUGENIDES



Donald Antrim, Brooklyn, May 29, 1996.



"The publisher loves my novel, but the art director says I can't be on the jacket."

flesh, as if she was wearing a mask made out of skin; the brow, and then those orbits, those sockets, those faceted lids . . . He had gained the vague impression, over the years, that Nip skirt ran itself ragged for you in the sack. As they'd need to do, in his opinion. Mal's mind shrugged. Christ. Maybe they let you fuck them in the *eye*.

Sheilagh called him on his mobile to say that the boys' buses had finally arrived.

3. MORTAL KOMBAT

He felt he was a man in a classic situation. Its oddities were just oddities: happenstance, not originality. As he moved outside into the air, exchanging the Irish colorations of the saloon (best expressed, perhaps, in the seething browns of Bern's bourbons) for the polar clarity of a mid-September noon, that was all he saw: his situation. The sun was neither hot nor high—just incredibly intense, as if you could *hear* it, the frying roar of its winds. Every year the sun did this, subjecting the kingdom to the fiercest and most critical scrutiny. It was checking up on the state of England. Sheilagh in her lime boiler suit came and stood beside him. He turned away. He said, "We've got to talk, She. Face to face."

"When?"

"Later," he said. Because now the boys were filing in through the gateway from the car park. Mal stood there, watching: a lesson in bad posture. In his peripheral vision Sheilagh breathed and swelled. How light the boys looked: how amazingly light.

For a younger woman. Abandoning his wife and his child . . . How true was that? Mal considered it possible to argue that Sheilagh wasn't really his wife. O.K., he'd married her. But only a year ago. As a nice surprise—like a birthday treat. Honestly, it didn't mean a thing. Mal had thought at the time that She overreacted. For months she went around with that greedy look on her face. And it wasn't just a look. She gained ten pounds over Christmas. *Abandoning his child.* Well, that was true enough. They had him bang to rights on that one. On the day he broke the news: the idea was, Mal'd tell him, and then She'd take him off to see "Mortal Kombat." Which Jet had been yearning to see for months—aching, pining. And Jet didn't want to go to it. Mal watched Sheilagh trying to drag him down the street, his gym shoes, his gray tracksuit bottoms, his stubborn bum. Mal took him to "Mortal Kombat" the following week. Fucking stupid. Booting each other in the face for twenty minutes without so much as a fat lip.

Here came the kid now, with his mother already bending over him to straighten the collar of his polo shirt and pat his styled hair. Styled hair? Since when was that? Jesus: an earring. That was Sheilagh playing the fun young mum. You know: take him down Camden Market and buy him a leather jacket. Keeping his counsel, for now, Mal crouched down (*A!*) to kiss Jet's cheek and tousle his—wait. No, he wouldn't want that tousled. Jet wiped his cheek and said, "Dad? Who beat you up?"

"We was outnumbered. Heavily outnumbered." He did a calculation. There'd been about thirty of them. "Fifteen to one. Me and Fat Lol." He didn't tell Jet that fifteen of them had been women.

"Dad?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you running in the Fathers' Race?"

"No way."

Jet looked at his mother, who said, "Mal, you got to."

"No way, no day. It'll do me back in."

"Mal."

"No shape, no form."

"But Dad."

"No way José."

Mal looked down. The boy was staring with great narrowness of attention, almost cross-eyed, and with his mouth dropped open—staring into the hills and valleys of his father's wound.

"You just concentrate on your own performance," Mal told him.

"But Dad. You're meant to be a *bouncer*," said Jet.

Bouncing, being a bouncer—as a trade, as a calling—had the wrong reputation. Bouncing, Mal believed, was misunderstood.

Throughout the seventies, he had served all night long at many an exclusive doorway, had manned many a prestigious portal, more often than not with Fat Lol at his side. The team: Big Mal and Fat Lol. They started together at the Hammersmith Palais. Soon they worked their way up to West End places like Ponsonby's and Fauntleroy's. He did it for fifteen years, but it only took about a week to get the hang of it.

Bouncing wasn't really about bouncing—about chucking people out. Bouncing was about not letting them in. That was pretty much all there was to it—to bouncing. Oh, yeah. And saying "Sir," and "Gentlemen."

See a heavy drunk or one of those white-lipped weasel weights, and it's "Sorry, sir, you can't come in. Why? Cos you're not a member, sir. If you can't find a taxi at this hour, sir, we'd be happy to call you a minicab here from the door."

See a load of obvious steamers coming down the mews in their suits, and it's "Good evening to you gentlemen. No I'm sorry, gentlemen. Gentlemen, this club is members only. Oi! Look, hold up, lads. Gentlemen! Lol! O.K. O.K. If you're still wide awake, gentlemen, may I recommend Jimmy's, at 32 Noel Street, bottom bell. Left and left again."

About once a week, usually at weekends, Mr. Carburton would come down to the door, stare you in the eye, and say, with dreadful weariness, "Who fucking let *them* in."

You'd go, "Who?"

"Who? Them two fucking nutcases who're six foot six with blue chins."

"Seemed all right." And you might have added, in your earlier days, "They was with a bird."

"They're *always* with a bird."

But the bird's disappeared and the blokes are hurling soda siphons around and you head up the stairs and you . . . So the only time you did any actual bouncing was when you had failed: as a bouncer. Bouncing was a mop-up operation made necessary by faulty bouncing. The best bouncers never did any bouncing. Only bad bouncers bounced. It might have sounded complicated, but it wasn't.

. . . In their frilly shirts, their reeking tuxes, Mal and Fat Lol, on staircases, by fire exits, or standing bent over the till at five in the morning when the lights came on full, and at the flick of a switch you went from opulence to poverty—all the lacquer, glamour, sex, privilege, empire, wiped out, in a rush of electricity.

That was also the time of genuine danger. Astonishing, sometimes, the staying power of those you'd excluded and turned away—turned away, pushed away, shoved, shouldered, clipped, slapped, smacked, tripped, kicked, kneed, nutted, loafed. Or just told, "Sorry, sir." They'd wait all night—or come back, weeks or months later. You'd escort the palely breakfastless hat-check girl to her Mini and then head on down the mews to your own vehicle through the mist of the Ripper dawn. And he'd be waiting, leaning against the wall by the car, finishing a bottle of milk and weighing it in his hands.

Because some people will not be excluded. Some people will not be turned away. . . . Mal bounced here, Mal bounced there; he bounced away for year after year, without serious injury. Until one night. He was leaving early, and there on the steps was the usual shower of chauffeurs and minicabbies, hookers, hustlers, ponces, tricks, twanks, mugs, and marks, and, as Mal jovially shouldered his way through, a small shape came close, saying breathily, dry-mouthed, *Hold that, mate*. . . . Suddenly Mal was backing off fast in an attempt to get a good look at himself: at the blade in his gut and the blood following the pleats of his soiled white shirt. He thought, What's all this you hear about getting stabbed not hurting? Comes later, doesn't it—the pain? No, mate: it comes now. Like a great paper cut to the heart. Mal's belly, his proud, placid belly, was abruptly the scene of hysterical rearrangements. And he felt the need to speak, before he fell.

The moment was familiar to him. He'd seen them go down, his comrades, the tuxed custodians of the bronze door knocker and the coach-house lantern. The big schwartzer Darius, sliding down a lamppost after he'd stopped a tire iron outside Ponsonby's. Or Fat Lol himself, in Fauntleroy's, crashing from table to table with half a beer bottle in his crown. They wanted to say something, before they went. It made you think of fifties war films. What was it? "I've copped it in the back, sir." Not that the falling bouncer ever managed to blurt much out: an oath, a vow. It was the look on their faces, wanting acknowledgment or respect, because here they were, in a kind of uniform—the big black bow tie, the little black shoes—and going down in the line of service. Going down, they wanted it recognized that they'd earned their salt. Did they want to say—or hear—the word "Sir"?

He walked backward until his shoulders crashed into the windowsill. He landed heavily on his arse: *A!* Fat Lol knelt to cradle him.

"Here, Lol, I'm holding one," said Mal. "Jesus, I'm gone, mate. I'm gone!"

Fat Lol wanted the name of the man who'd done him. And so did the police. Mal couldn't help them with their inquiries. "Don't know him from Adam," he insisted, reckoning he'd never before set eyes on the bloke. But he had. It came to him eventually, his memory stirred by hospital food.

Hospital food. Mal would never own up to it, but he loved hospital food. Not a good sign, that, when you start fancying your hospital food. You hear the creak of the trolley, instantaneously suffusing the whole ward with that smell of warm damp newspaper, and suddenly your mauled gut rips into life like an outboard motor and you're gulping down half a pint of drool. It shows you're getting institutionalized in the worst way. He had no use for the pies and quiches that Sheilagh brought in for him. Either he'd bin them or give the grub to the stiffs on his ward. The old guys—in the furnace of the night they whinnied like pub dogs having nightmares under the low tables. . . .

It was as he was kissing his bunched fingertips and congratulating the dinner lady on her most recent triumph that Mal suddenly remembered: remembered the man who'd done him. "Jesus Christ," he said to the dinner lady in her plastic pinafore. "Ridiculous, innit. I mean I never even . . ." Warily, the old dear moved on, leaving Mal frowning and shaking his head (and digging into his meal). It was the fried skin of the fish fingers: in this surface Mal recognized the dark ginger of his assailant's hair. On the night of the stabbing, and on another night, months earlier, *months* . . . It was late, it was cold: Mal on the steps of Fauntleroy's, sealing off the lit doorway like a boulder with his bulk, and the little ginge going, "Am I hearing you saying that I'm not good enough?"

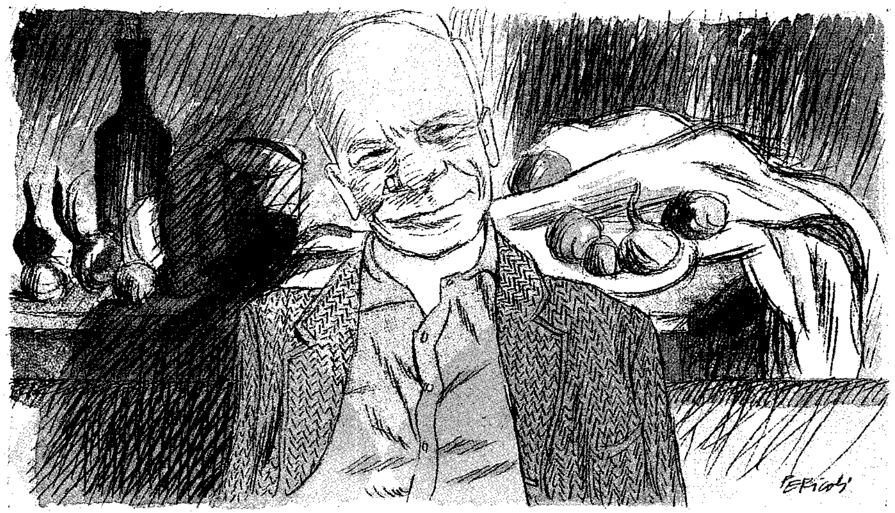
"I don't know what you're hearing, mate, but what I'm saying is it's members only."

Calling him "mate" and not "sir": this

LETTERS • WALKER PERCY

SHAKESPEARE HAD IT EASY

The author corresponded frequently with the novelist and Southern historian Shelby Foote, a friend since childhood.



TULLIO PERICOLI

Covington, Louisiana
October 19, 1973

DEAR SHELBY:

Well, I ain't doing much, and that's a fact. Enjoy yourself while you can, while you're doing a great work about a great thing that already happened. Because it's a different cup of tea when you go back to making up stories. There's the rub: sometimes I come to myself and think: what are you, a grown aging man, doing sitting around making up stories? What I've been doing is: (1) writing an Introduction to a new paperback edition of "Lanterns on the Levee," (2) finishing an article in the works for years called simply "A Theory of Language" (I'll say no more, knowing how this turns you off: in fact, that's how the article begins: why people can't think about a theory of language, which is something like wearing gold-colored eyeglasses and trying to see gold), (3) this here novel. If I should try to tell you anything about it, it would be a lie and wouldn't sound like what it is, since what it is is in the telling as you well know. I think what's got me down is that the novel is attempting the impossible: to write about the great traditional themes, sin, God, love, death etc., when in fact these themes are no longer with us, we've left them, even death, or they've left us. I've been in a long spell of accedie, anomie and aridity in which, unlike the saints who writhe under the assaults of devils, I simply get sleepy and doze off. I'm also bemused by the reality of being the oldest male Percy in history; 57, so what lies ahead is virgin territory; imagine a Percy with arthritis! senility! Parkinsonism, shuffling along, fingers rolling pills, head agoing! I don't know whether I'm looking forward to doing a great thing like Kant and Spinoza and Verdi in the 1980s or whether I'll jump in the Bogue Falaya next week with a sugar kettle on my head. My Catholicism consists just now and mainly in the deepest kind of hunch that it all works out, generally for the good, and everybody gets their deserts—which is frightening. But, I mean, artistically, there is no sweat. One waits. Not for the Muse, fuck her, but until one finds a new language, because that's about what it takes, the language is about dead.

This is all mostly bull. You know what my real sin is? Laziness. Which is to say that if I were broke, had four squalling kids and a deadline, I'd be working my ass off, nicht? That's how come they call it a mortal sin. My only defense is that I was born lazy.

P.S. Shakespeare had it easy: he had a language, a new language, busting out all around him, and he didn't even have to make up stories: the stories were around him too. We have to do it *all*, including the impossible or all but impossible task: make up a language as you go along. All you have to do to be a good novelist now is to be like God on the first day. ♦

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meant that Mal's patience was being sorely tried.

"It's as I'm a workingman like."

"No, mate. I'm a workingman too. But I won't be if I let you in. Regulations. This is a clip joint, mate. What you want to do, come in here and buy some tart a glass of Lucozade for eighty-five quid? Go off home."

"So you don't like my kind."

"Yeah, it's your ginger hair, mate. Ginger-haired blokes ain't admitted. Here. It's late. It's cold. Walk away."

"Am I hearing you saying I'm not good enough?"

"Look fuck off out of it."

And that was that. Something of the sort happened ten times a night. But this little ginge waits until spring and then comes back and leaves a blade in Mal's gut: "Hold that, mate." And now *Mal* was on the Lucozade, and eating fish fingers off a tray that slid up the bed.

I've copped it in the back, sir. . . . From "The Dam Busters," the film that, as a child, he had so pined to see. Like Jet with "Mortal Kombat." He thought of another of its lines: "Nigger's dead, sir." Delivered awkwardly, tenderly, the man breaking it to the senior officer. Meaning the dog. They had a dog called Nigger. Their little black dog, their unofficial mascot, who dies, was called Nigger. You couldn't do that now. No way. In a film. Call a *dog* Nigger? No way, no day. Times change. Call a *black* dog Nigger? No shape, no form. Be down on you like a . . . Call a dead black dog Nigger in a film? No way José.

4. BURGER KING

So class and race and gender were supposedly gone (and other things were supposedly going, like age and beauty and even education): all the really automatic ways people had of telling who was better or worse—they were gone. Right-thinkers everywhere were claiming that they were clean of prejudice, that in them the inherited formulations had at last been purged. This they had decided. But for those on the pointed end of the operation—the ignorant, say, or the ugly—it wasn't just a decision. Some of them had no new clothes. Some were still dressed in the uniform of their deficiencies. Some were still wearing the same old shit.

Some would never be admitted.

Mal looked on, and stiffened. The

gym master went by with his bullhorn like a prototype mobile phone, calling the names for the first event. The parents faced the track, and the fantastic interrogation of the low sun, with binoculars, cameras, camcorders, and all their *other* children—little sisters, big brothers, and babies (crying, yawning, dangling a pouched foot). Mal looked on, careful to maintain a distance of at least two parents between himself and Sheilagh, her green boiler suit, her fine, light, russety hair. Between them bobbed other heads of hair work—gray streaks, pageboy, urchin, dyed caramel; and, among the men, various tragedies of disappearance, variously borne, and always the guy with a single strand pasted across his dome, as if one sideburn had thrown a line to the other. Maybe the sun wasn't staring but turning the lights on full, like at Fauntleroy's when dawn came (and you wondered at the value of what you'd been guarding), so everybody could just see for themselves.

Runners in regulation off-white shorts and T-shirts were gathering on the starting line. Mal consulted his program: a single cyclostyled sheet. Lost in concentration (lips working), he felt a pull on his arm.

"Oi," he said. For it was Jet. "Better get out there, mate."

"This is the fourth form."

"What are you in then?"

"Seventy metres and two-twenty."

". . . So you ain't on for a while. Right. Let's work on your preparation."

Jet turned away. The styled hair, the gold earring. For a second the backs of his ears gleamed orange and transparent. Now Jet turned again and looked at him with that shy leer in the raised upper lip. Jesus: his teeth were blue. But that was O.K. It was just the trace of a lolly he'd managed to get down him, not some new way of deliberately looking horrible. The law of fashion said that every child had to offend its parents aesthetically. Mal had offended his parents aesthetically: the drainpipes and brothel creepers, the hair like a riptide of black grease. Jet had contrived to offend Mal aesthetically. And Jet's kids, when they came, would face the arduous task of aesthetically offending Jet.

"O.K., let's get your head right. Go through the prep drill. Point One."

And again the boy turned away. Stood his ground, but turned away. For two academic years running, Jet had come nineteenth in his class of twenty. Mal liked to think that Jet made up for this with his dad-tweaked excellence on the sports field. The gym, the squash court, the pool, the park: training became the whole relationship. Of late, naturally, their sessions had been much reduced. But they still went to the rec on Saturday afternoons, with the stopwatch, the football, the discus, the talc. And Jet seemed less keen these days. And Mal, too, felt differently. Now, seeing Jet bottling a header or tanking a sprint, Mal would draw in breath to scold or embolden him and then silently exhale. And feel nothing but nausea. He no longer had the authority or the will. And then came the blackest hour: Jet dropped from the school football team. . . . A distance was opening up between father and son, and how do you close it? How do you do that? Every Saturday lunchtime they sat in the totparty toy town of McDonald's, Jet with his Happy Meal (burger, fries, and a plastic doodad worth ten pee), Mal with his Chicken McNuggets or his Fish McCod. They didn't eat. Like lovers over their last supper in a restaurant—the food not even looked at, let alone touched. Besides, for some time now the very sight of a burger was enough to give Mal's stomach a jolt. It was like firing a car when it was in first gear and the hand brake was on: a forward lurch that took you nowhere. Mal had had an extreme experience with burgers. Burger hell: he'd been there, mate.

"Dad?"

"Yeah?"

"Are you running in the dads' race?"

"Told you. Can't do it, mate. Me back."

"And your face."

"Yeah. And me face."

They watched the races. And, well, how clear do you want it to be, that a boy's life is all races? School is an exam and a competition and a popularity contest: it's racing demon. And you saw how the kids were equipped for it by nature—never mind the interminable trials in the rec (never mind the great bent thumb on the stopwatch): lummoxy lollopers, terrifying achievers, sloths, hares, and everything in between. They began as one body, the racers, one pack; and then as if by natural process they moved apart, some forging ahead, others (while still going forward) dropping back. The longer the race, the bigger the differences. Mal tried to imagine the runners staying in line all the way, and finishing as they had begun. And it wasn't human somehow. It couldn't be imagined, not on this planet.

Jet's first event was called.

"Now remember," said Mal, all hunkered down. "Accelerate into the lengthened stride. Back straight, knees high. Cut the air with the stiff palms. Shallow breathing till you breast that tape."

In the short time it took Jet to reach the starting blocks—and despite the heat and color of Sheilagh's boiler suit as it established itself at his side—Mal had fully transformed himself into the kind of sports-circuit horrorparent you read about in the magazines. Why? Simple: because he wanted to live his life again, through the boy. His white-knuckled dukes were held at shoulder height; his brow was scrunched up over the bridge of his nose; and his bloodless lips, in a desperate whisper, were saying, "Ventilate! Work the flow! Loosen up! Loosen up!"

But Jet was not loosening up. He wasn't loosening and limbering the way Mal had taught him (the way TV had taught Mal), jogging on the spot and wiggling his arms in the air and gasping like an iron lung. Jet was just standing there. And as Mal stared pleadingly on, he felt that Jet looked—completely exceptional. He couldn't put his finger on it. Not the tallest, not the lithest. But Jet looked completely exceptional. The starting pistol gave its tinny report. After two seconds Mal slapped a hand over his eyes: *A!*

"Last?" he said, when the noise was over.

"Last," said Sheilagh, steelily. "Now you leave that boy be."

Soon Jet was squirming his way through to them and Sheilagh was saying unlucky and never mind, darling, and all this; and his impulse, really, was to do what Mal's dad would have done to Mal at such loss of face, and put Jet in hospital for a couple of weeks. See how he liked that. But such ways were old and gone, and he had no will, and the impulse passed. Besides, the boy was uneasily casting himself about, and wouldn't meet his eye. Mal now felt that he had to offer something, something quixotic, perverse, childish.

"Listen. This Saturday, down the rec, we're going to work on your pace. We'll get a burger down you, for your strength, and then we're going to work on your pace. And guess what. I'll eat a burger. I'll eat two."

This was a family joke; and family

jokes can go either way, when you're no longer a family.

Sheilagh said, “Hark at Burger King.”

Jet said, “*Return* of Burger King.”

Burger King was a kind of nickname. Jet was smiling at him sinisterly: teeth still blue.

“I will. I swear. For Jet. Blimey. Oop. Jesus. It's happening. I'm for it now. Here, She. Whoop.”

Eat burgers? He couldn't even *say* burgers.

California. When Joseph Andrews's final face-lift went so badly wrong, and he had to cancel the Vegas thing and shut down his whole West Coast operation, Big Mal decided to stay out in L.A. and give it a go on his own. He shifted his real money to London but kept back a few grand, as his stake. There were offers, schemes, projects. He had made many good friends in the business and entertainment communities. Time to call in a few favors.

And this was how it went: after twenty-three days he was, he believed, on the brink of clinical starvation. People had let him down. He had given up eating, drinking, and smoking, in that order. He was seeing things, and hearing them, too. In the motel, at night, strangers who weren't really there moved round him, solicitously. He'd be sitting on a patch of grass somewhere and a bird in the tree would start singing a song. Not a bird's song. A Beatles song. Like “Try and See It My Way,” with all the words. By this stage he was rootling through supermarket Dumpsters and discovering that food, so various in its colors and textures, could lose identity and become just one thing. Everywhere he went he was turned away. Even the supermarket Dumpsters were often guarded, in case the trash was tainted, and you ate it, and then sued.

Dawn on the final morning: it was Mal's forty-fifth birthday. He awoke in the driver's seat of the old Subaru—in a cinema parking lot out by the airport somewhere. Sheilagh had sorted a ticket for him from the London end: fourteen hours to go. He regarded the flight home not as a journey, not as a return, not as a defeat, but as a free meal. Peanuts first, he thought. Or Bombay Mix.

When he saw the sign he thought it was just another hallucination. “Maurie's Birthday Burger” . . . All you had to do was show up with your driver's license. You could expect a free burger, and a hero's welcome. Maurie's had more than seventy outlets in Greater Los Angeles. And once Mal got going, there didn't seem any good reason to stop. After the thirtieth or thirty-fifth burger, you couldn't really say he was in it for the grub. But he kept going. It was because Maurie was doing what nobody else was doing: Maurie was letting Mal in.

Gastrically things were already not looking too bright when he arrived at LAX and checked in his luggage: a ripped ten-gallon bag containing all he owned. He made it to the gate more or less O.K. It was on the plane that everything started getting out of hand. It appeared that Maurie, that week, had been sold a dodgy batch of meat. Whatever the facts of the matter, Mal felt, as he reached for his seat belt, that he was buckling in twenty pounds of mad cow.

Five hours later, over the Baffin Bay: serious flight-deck discussion of an emergency landing in Disko, Greenland, as Mal continued to reel around the aircraft patiently devastating one can after another. They even let him loose on Business. Then, finally, as they cruised in over County Cork, and the passengers were being poked awake, and some of them, stretching and scratching, were slipping away with their wash bags . . . well, it seemed to Mal (shrunken, mythically pale, and growing into his seat like a toadstool) that the only possibility was mass ejection. Three hundred parachutes, like three hundred burger buns, streaming down over the Welsh valleys, and the plane heading on, grand and blind.

At the airport he asked She to marry him. He was trembling. Winter was coming and he was afraid of it. He wanted to be safe.

“Jet!” cried Mal. He could hear the kid fumbling around outside.

“Dad!”

“In here!”

Mal was in the clubhouse toilet, alone, cooling his brow against the mirror and leaning on the smudged sink.

“You all right?”

“Yeah, mate. It passed.”

“Does it hurt?” said Jet, meaning his wound.

“Nah, mate. Bit of discomfort.”

“How'd you get it? Who did it?”

He straightened up. “Son?” he began—for he felt he owed Jet an explanation, a testament, a valediction. The fall rays were staring through the thick wrinkled glass. “Son? Listen to me.” His voice echoed, godlike, in the Lucozade light. “Every now and again you're going to get into one. You go into one and it's not going to go your way. Sometimes you can see one coming and sometimes you can't. And some you can *never* see coming. So you just take what comes. O.K.?”

“You and Fat Lol.”

“Me and Fat Lol. Should see the state of *him*.”

The boy wagged his haircut toward the door.

Mal said, “Now what?”

“Two-twenty.”

“Oi. Listen. Jet. I'll run if you will. O.K.? I'll run the dads' race. And give it me all. If you will. Deal?”

Jet nodded. Mal looked down at his hair: seemed like they'd gone round the edge of it with a clipper or whatever, leav-

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PSYCHOANALYSIS

No matter how total the shipwreck,
His hands still fasten planks to the deck—
*Some*one will walk across it to the beam.
He keeps bobbing back,
Like Moses on a stream.

What matter the crazy moon above,
The stormy waves, the wind, the calm,
How young the skipper, or how old,
The baby's back,
Laughing in the hold.

—Howard Moss
(1922-1987)

ing a shaved track two or three inches wide. . . . As Mal followed him outside he realized something. Jet on the starting line with all the others: he had looked completely exceptional. Not the tallest. Not the lithest. What, then? He was the whitest. He was just the whitest.

Now that prejudice was gone everyone could relax and concentrate on money.

Which was fine if you had some.

5. RHYMING SLANG

To be frank, Fat Lol couldn't believe that Mal was still interested.

"You?" he said. "You? Big Mal: minder to the superstars?"

Yeah, that was it. Big Mal: mega-minder. Mal said, "How *you* doing then?"

"Me? I'm onna dole, mate. I'm onna street. So I put myself about. But you?"

"That's all kind of dried up. Joseph Andrews and that. I'm basically short. Temporarily. Hopefully. So with all the changes going down I need any extra I can get."

Mal could not speak altogether freely. With the two men, round the table, sat Fat Lol's wife, Yvonne, and their six-year-old son, little Vic. They were having lunch in Del's Caff on Paradise Street in the East End—and it was like another world. Mal and Fat Lol were born in the same house in the same week; but Mal had come on, and Fat Lol hadn't. Mal had evolved. There he sat, in his shell suit, with his dark glasses—a modern person. *His* son had a modern name: Jet. He could call his Asian babe on his mobile phone. And he had left home. Which you didn't do. And there was Fat Lol in his Sloppy Joe, his sloppy jeans, and his old suèdes, with his wife looking like a bank robber and his son flinching when either parent made a move for the vinegar or the brown sauce. Fat Lol was still in the muscle business (this and that). He had felt the tug of no other calling. He had stayed with it, like a brand loyalty.

"So," said Fat Lol, "what you're saying, if there's something going—this and that—you'd be on for a bit of it."

"Exactly."

"On a part-time basis. Nights."

"Yeah."

Fat Lol: he provided dramatic proof of the proposition that you are what you eat. Fat Lol was what he ate. More than this, Fat Lol was what he was eating. And he was eating, for his lunch, an English breakfast—Del's All Day Special at £3.25. His mouth was a strip of undercooked bacon, his eyes a mush of egg yolk and tinned tomatoes. His nose was like the end of a lightly grilled pork sausage—then the baked beans of his complexion, the furry mushrooms of his ears. Paradise Street right down to his bum crack—that was Fat Lol. A loaf of fried bread on legs. Mal considered the boy: silent, cautious, eying the fruit machine with cunning and patience.

Yvonne said, "So you're having a bit of bother making ends meet. Since you went off with that Lucozade."

"No unpleasantness, please, Yv," said Mal solemnly. They didn't see each other so often now, but for many years Yv and She had been best mates. And Yv was always sharp, like her name, like her face. "She ain't a Lucozade anyway. Come on, Yv. In this day and age?"

Yvonne went on eating, busily, with her head down. Last mouthful. There.

"She ain't a Lucozade anyway." People thought that Lucozade was rhyming slang for *spade*. But Mal knew that spades weren't called Lucozades because spade rhymed with Lucozade. Spades were called Lucozades because spades *drank* Lucozade. Anyway, Linzi was from Bombay and she drank gin. "She's of Indian extraction but she was born right here on Paradise Street."

"Same difference," said Yvonne.

"Shut it," said Fat Lol.

When closed, as now, *it*—Yv's mouth—looked like a copper coin stuck in a slot. No, there wasn't any slot: just the nicked rim of the penny jamming it. Dear oh dear, thought Mal: the state of her boat. Boat was rhyming slang for face (via *boat race*). It had never struck him as appropriate or evocative until now. Her whole head like a prow, a tight corner, a hairpin bend.

"Linzi—when she signs her name," said Yvonne. "Does she do a little circle over the last 'i'?"

Mal considered. "Yeah," he said.

"Thought so. Just like any other little English slag. Does she do the same with 'Pakki'?"

"Shut it," said Fat Lol.

Later, in the Queen Mum, Fat Lol said, "What you doing tonight?"

"Not a lot."

"There's some work on if you fancy it."

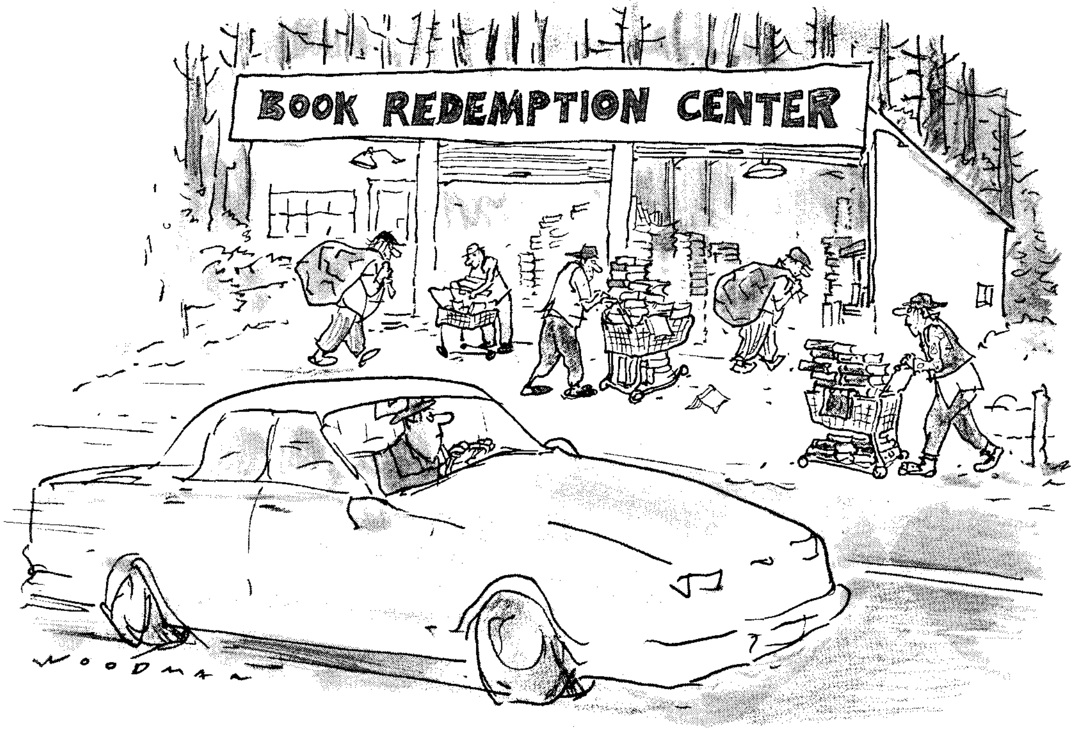
"Yeah?"

"Clamping."

"Clamping?"

"Yeah," said Fat Lol. "Onna clamps."

Yv had a been-around face, and so did She. She's boat, as he remembered it, because he couldn't look at it, was trusting, gentle, yokelish, under its



duster of shallow red hair. Soon Mal would be obliged to look at that face, and look into it, and face that face with his.

But first Jet in the two-twenty!

“Stick to the game plan,” Mal was telling him. “Remember. Run it like it’s three seventy-metre sprints. One after the other.”

Jet leered up at him. What Mal’s game plan came down to, plainly enough, was that Jet should run flat out every step of the way.

“Go for it, son. Just do it.”

The raised starting pistol, the ragged lunge from the blocks . . . By the half-way point Jet had pelted himself into a narrow lead. “Now you dig deep,” Mal murmured, on the terrace, with She’s shape at his side. “Now it’s down to your desire. Dig, mate, *dig*. Dig! Dig! Dig!” As Jet came flailing on to the home straight—and as, one by one, all the other runners shot past him—Mal’s cold right hand was slowly seeking his brow. But then Jet seemed to topple forward. It was as if the level track had suddenly been tipped at an angle, and Jet wasn’t running but falling. He passed one runner, and another. . . .

When Mal went over Jet was still lying face down in the rusty cinders. Mal knelt, saying, “Fourth. Talk about a recovery. Great effort, mate. It was your character got you through that. It was your heart. I saw your heart out there. I saw your heart.”

Sheilagh was beyond them, waiting. Mal helped Jet to his feet and slipped him a quid for a tin of drink. The running track was bounded by a low fence; further off lay a field or whatever, with a mob of trees and bushes in the middle of it. There She was heading, Mal coming up behind her, head bent. As he stepped over the fence he almost blacked out with culture shock: the running track was a running track but this was *the country*. . . .

He came up to her wiggling a finger in the air. “Look. Sounds stupid,” he said. “But you go behind that bush and I’ll call you.”

“Call me?”

“On your mobile.”

“Mal!”

Turning and bending, he poked out her number. And he began.

“Sheilagh? Mal. Right. You know that woman we went to said I had a problem communicating? Well O.K. Maybe she was onto something. But here goes. Since I left you and little Jet I . . . It’s like I got gangrene or something. It’s all right for about ten minutes if I’m reading the paper or watching the golf. You know. Distracted. Or knocking a ball about with Val and Rodge.” Val and Rodge were, by some distance, the most elderly couple that Mal and Sheilagh played mixed doubles with at Kentish Town Sports. “Then it ain’t so bad. For ten minutes.” By now Mal had both his arms round his head, like a mouth organist. Because he was talking into his phone and crying into his sleeve. “I lost something and I never knew I had it. Me peace of mind. It’s like I know how you . . . how women feel. When you’re upset, you’re not just pissed off. You feel ill. Sick. It goes inside. I feel like a woman. Take me back, She. Do it. I swear I—”

He heard static and felt her hand on his shoulder. They hugged: *A!*

“Christ, Mal, who messed with your face?”

“Ridiculous, innit. I mean some people you just wouldn’t believe.”

And she breathed out, frowning, and started straightening his collar and brushing away its scurf with the back of her hand.

6. MOTOR SHOW

“Park inna Inn onna Park,” said Fat Lol.

“We ain’t doing it in there, are we?”

“Don’t talk fucking stupid. Pick up me van.”

Access to the innards of the Inn on the Park having been eased by Fat Lol’s acquaintance with—and remuneration of—one of the hotel’s garage attendants, the two men drove boldly down the ramp in Mal’s C-reg. B.M. They then hoisted themselves into Fat Lol’s Vauxhall Rascal and proceeded west through Mayfair and Soho. Mal kept peering in the back. The clamps lay there, heavily jumbled, like land mines from an old war.

“They don’t look like normal clamps. Too big.”

“Early model. Before they introduced the more compact one.”

“Bet they weigh.”

“They ain’t light,” conceded Fat Lol.

“How’s it go again?”

Mal had to say that the scheme made pretty good sense to him. Because it relied on turnover. Mass clamping: that was the order of the day. Clearly (or so Fat Lol argued), there wasn’t a lot of sense in tooling round the West End doing the odd Cortina on a double yellow line. Clamp a car, and you got seventy quid for de-clamping it. What you needed was cars in bulk. And where did you find cars in bulk? In a National Car Park.

But hang about: “How can you clamp a car in a National Car Park?”

“If they not in they bay. The marked area.”

“Bit harsh, innit mate?”

“It’s legal,” said Fat Lol indignantly. “You can clamp them even in an N.C.P. If they park bad.”

“Bet they ain’t too pleased about it.”

“No, they ain’t that chuffed.”

Fat Lol handed Mal a sample windscreen sticker. “Warning This Vehicle Is Illegally Parked. Do Not Attempt to Move It. For Prompt Assistance . . .” On the side window of his Rascal additional stickers indicated that Fat Lol welcomed all major credit cards.

“Give them a while and they cool off by the time you get there. Just want to get home. What’s it going to be anyway? Some little slag from Luton bring his wife in for a night onna town.”

They decided to kick off with a medium-rise just north of Leicester Square. No gatekeeper, no bouncer to deny them entry. The automatic arm of the barrier rose like a salute. On the second floor: “Bingo,” said Fat Lol. Twenty prime vehicles packed tight at one end, crouching, waiting, gleaming in the dangerous light of car parks.

Out they dropped. “Fucking *Motor* Show,” said Fat Lol. And it was true: the chrome heraldry, the galvannealed paintwork. They hesitated as a family saloon swung down from Level 3.

“Let’s do it.”

Disappointingly, only four vehicles were adjudged by Fat Lol to have outstepped their prescribed boundaries. But he soon saw another way.

“O.K. Let’s do them if they’re *touching* the white lines.”

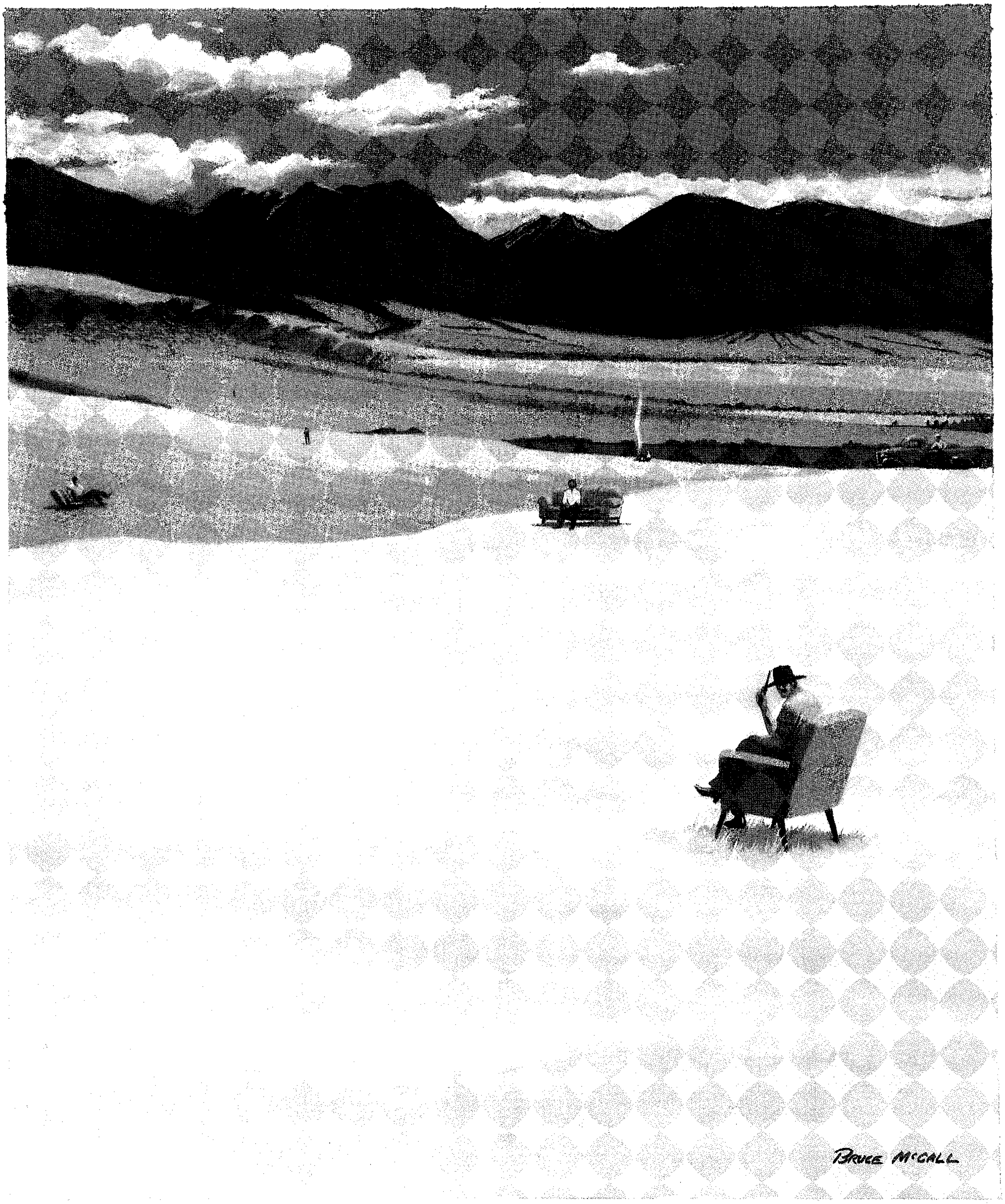
“In tennis,” said Mal moderately, “the white lines count in.”

“Well in clamping,” said Fat Lol, in a tight voice, bending low, “the white lines count *out*.”

It was warm and heavy work. These ancient gadgets, the clamps—they were like fucking steamrollers. You had to free them from the van and from each other and hump them into position. Next you got down there—*A!*—and worked the pipe wrench on the snap ratchet. Then:

EASEL · BY BRUCE McCALL

THE MONTANA SALON CONVENES



Richard Ford, Annick Smith, Jim Harrison, Beverly Lowry, William Kittredge, and Tom McGuane. Absent: Rick Bass.

thwock. There was the clamp with its jaw fast on the car's wheel. One bit was quite satisfying: spreading the gummy white sticker all over the windscreen.

Fat Lol was down there doing a K-reg. Jag when Mal said, "Oi. I can see your bum crack."

"Bend down." Fat Lol stood up. "I can see yourn."

"You said dress casual."

"With a car like this," Fat Lol announced huskily, "—it tears you apart. I mean, with a car like this, you don't want to clamp it."

"You want to nick it."

"Nah. To clamp a motor such as this, it's . . ."

"Sacrilege."

"Yeah. It's fucking *sacrilege* to mess with a motor such as this."

Mal heard it first. Like something detaching itself from the siren song of Leicester Square, where the old sounds of various thrashed and envassalled machines contended with the sound of the new, its pings, pips, peeps, beeps, bleeps, tweets and squawks and yawps . . . Big Mal heard it first, and paused there, down on one knee with his pipe wrench. A concentrated body of purposeful human conversation was moving toward them, the sopranos and contraltos of the women, the sterling trebles and barrelly baritones of the men, coming up round the corner now, like a ballroom, like civilization, uniforms of tuxedo and then streaks and plumes of turquoise, emerald, taffeta, dimity.

"Lol mate," said Mal.

Fat Lol was a couple of cars further in, doing a Range Rover and tightly swearing to himself.

"Lol!"

You know what it was like? A revolution in reverse—that's what it was like. Two bum-crack cowboys scragged and cudgelled by the quality. Jesus: strung up by the upper classes. What seemed most amazing, looking back, was how totally they folded, the two big lads, how their bottom, their legitimacy, just evaporated on them there and then. Fat Lol managed to get to his feet and splutter something about these vehicles being parked illegally. Or parked improperly. Or plain parked bad. And that was the extent of their resistance. Big Mal and Fat Lol, those bottle-ripped veterans of ruck and maul, dispersing the leather in cross alleys and on walkways, on dance-hall staircases, elbowing their way out of bowling alleys and snooker-hall toilets, crouching and panting by dully shining exit doors—they just rolled over. *We didn't want to know.* . . . Mal tried to wriggle in under the Lotus he was doing but they were on him like the S.A.S. The first blow he took from the pipe wrench knocked him spark-out. Soon afterward he awoke and, leaning on an elbow in a pool of blood and oil, watched Fat Lol being slowly hauled by the hair from car to car, with the ladies queuing and jockeying to give him another kick up the arse, as best they could, in their gowns. The ladies! The language! Then they were on Mal again, and he stopped another one from the pipe wrench. I've copped it in the back, sir. Nigger's dead, sir. . . . No rest for the wicked. And ain't that the fucking truth. They hoisted Mal upright, giving his mouth a nice smack on the headlight frame, and had him slewing from bonnet to bonnet, prizing at the windscreen stickers with his cold white fingers. This vehicle is illegally. For prompt assistance. All major . . . And after a last round of kicks and taunts their cars were chirruping and wincing and whirring into life; they were gone, leaving Fat Lol and Big Mal groping toward each other through the fumes and echoes and the heap of cheap clamps, gasping, dripping, jetsam of the machine age.

7. SAD SPRINTER

"OPERAGOERS." Sheilagh said, "Operagoers?"

"Operagoers. O.K., it was a bit of a liberty, me and Fat Lol. You could argue we was out of order. . . ."

"You sure it was operagoers?"

"Yeah. I thought it might have been a première crowd. Been to a Royal Première or something." Mal and Linzi had recently attended a Royal Première, at considerable expense. And he thought it must have been decades since he had been with a rougher crew: fifteen hundred trogs in dinner jackets, plus their molls. "No, they left programs. The Coliseum. They ain't nice, you know, She," he cautioned her. Sheilagh had a weakness for films in which the aristocracy played cute. "The contempt. They were like *vicious.*"

"I've been to the Coliseum. They do it in English. It's better because you can tell what's going on."

Mal nodded long-sufferingly.

"You can follow the story."

He nodded a second time.

"You doing the dads' race?"

"Well I got to now."

"With your face in that state? You're no good on your own, Mal. You're no good on your own."

Mal turned away. The shrubs, the falling leaves—the trees: what *kind* were they? Even in California . . . Even in California all he knew of nature was the mild reek of rest stops when he pulled over, in his chauffeur's cap, for leaks between cities (a can made of nature and butts and book matches), or lagoon-style restaurants where mobsters ate lobsters; one year She came out with little Jet for a whole term (not a success) and Mal learned that American schools regarded tomato ketchup as a vegetable. And throughout his life there had been symbols, like fruit machines and hospital fruit salads and the plastic fruit on his mother's hat, forty years ago, at *his* Sports Day. And his dad's curt haircut and Sunday best. Say what you like about forty years ago. Say what you like about his parents, and everyone else's, then, but the main thing about them was that they were married, and looked it, and dressed it, and meant it.

She said, "If you come back—don't do it if you don't mean it."

"No way," he said. "No way, no day. No shape, no form . . ."

With a nod she started off, and Mal followed. Mal followed, watching the rhythmic but asymmetrical rearrangements of her big womanly backside, where all her strength and virtue seemed to live, her character, her fathom. And he could see it all. Coming through the door for the bear hug with Jet, and then the hug of Momma Bear and Poppa Bear. The deep-breathing assessment of all he had left behind. And the smile coagulating on his face. Knowing that in ten minutes, twenty, two hours, twenty-four, he would be back out the door with Jet's arms round his knees, his ankles, like a sliding tackle, and She behind him somewhere, flushed, tousled, in a light sweat of readiness to continue with the next fuck or fight, to continue, to continue. And Mal'd be out the door, across the street at Linzi's, watching "Asian Babes" and freeing his mind of all thoughts about the future . . . As he stepped over the fence he looked toward the car park and—whoops—there she was, Linzi, his Asian babe, perched on the low boot of her M.G. Midget. Sheilagh paused. Linzi on her car boot, She in her boiler suit. Boots and boilers. Where was transformation? If Linzi wanted new breasts, a new bum—if she wanted to climb into a catsuit made out of a teen-ager—then it was absolutely A-O.K. with Mal.

"Dad?"

"Jet mate."

"They're ready."

Mal kicked off his tasselled loafers and started limbering up: *A!* He was giving Jet his jacket to hold when his mobile rang.

"Lol! Been trying you all day, mate. Some Arab answered."

Fat Lol said he'd had to flog it: his mobile.

"How come?"

His van got clamped!

"Tell me about it. They did me B.M.!"

You and all!

"Yeah. Look, can't talk, son. Got a race to run."

Fat Lol said he was going to do something tonight.

"Yeah?"

Onna car alarms.

"Yeah?"

"Dad? They're waiting. Boost it."

"I'm on it, mate."

"And don't fuck up," said Jet.

"When do I ever?"

"You're a crap sprinter, Dad."

"You what?"

"You're a *sad* sprinter."

"Oh yeah? Watch this."

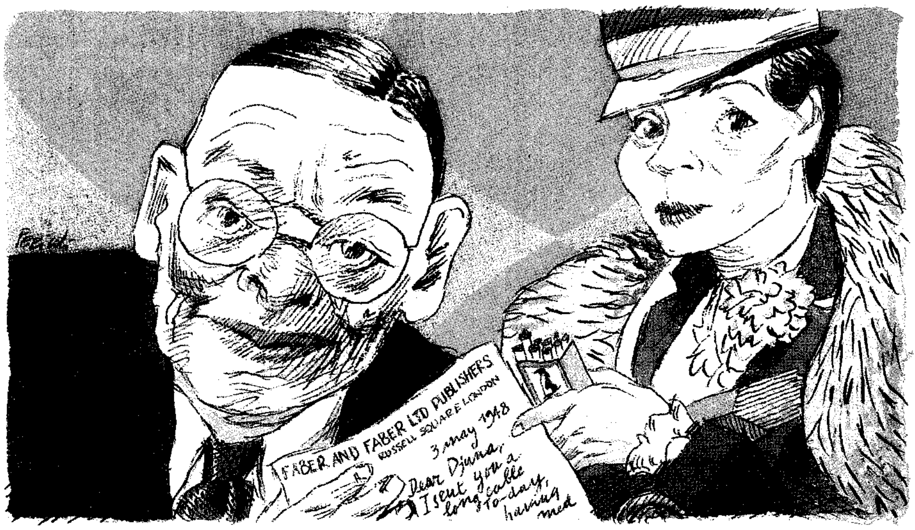
The dads were in a rank on the starting line: Bern, Nusrat, Fardous, Someth, Adrian, Mikio, Paratosh, and the rest of them, no great differences in age but all at various stages along the track, waistlines, hairlines, worldlines, with various c.v.s of separation, contentment, estrangement, some of *their* dads dead, some of their mums still living. Mal joined them. This was the dads' race. But dads are always racing, against each other, against themselves. That's what dads do.

It was the gunshot that made the herd stampede. Instantly Mal felt about nineteen things go at once. All the links and joins—hip, knee, ankle, spine—plus an urgent liquefaction on the side of his face. After five stumbling bounds the pain barrier was on him and wouldn't get out of the way. But the big man raced on, as you've got to do. The dads raced on, with heavy ardor, and thundering, their feet stockinged or gym-shoed but all in the wooden clogs of their years. Their heads bent back, their chests outthrust, they gasped and slavered for the turn in the track and the post at the end of the straight. ♦

LETTERS • T. S. ELIOT AND DJUNA BARNES

A RATIONAL EXCHANGE

In 1936, Faber & Faber published "Nightwood," by Djuna Barnes. T. S. Eliot, one of Faber's directors, wrote an introduction to the book which was included in later editions. The following correspondence, which has been edited, begins during the Second World War. Barnes, who had been living in Europe, had returned to America. Eliot paid for the storage of her furniture in London; in exchange, Barnes sent him food parcels from New York. The final letter is addressed to Eliot's wife.


FABER AND FABER LTD PUBLISHERS
RUSSELL SQUARE LONDON
3 may 1948
Dear Djuna,
I sent you a long cable to-day, having med

Near Guildford, Surrey
December 2, 1940

DARLING DJUNA!

I was more than pleased to hear from you. After the beginning of the war, when many lines of communication were interrupted, and people disappeared for longer or shorter periods from one's sight, I heard that you had arrived in New York. Otherwise, I should have speculated later on the horrid possibilities of your getting stuck in Switzerland or somewhere, or making your way on foot (picking up a few sous by telling fortunes perhaps) to Lisbon etc. What I don't quite understand is your assuming that you have lost all your property in London—unless you happen to know the place of storage was destroyed—if there are any enquiries I can make etc. please let me know. But, however relieved I was to learn that you had arrived in New York, I did not for a moment suppose that your troubles were over: trouble, I believe, is in your destiny, and the meaning of *that* is that its purpose is to provide you, directly or indirectly, with material for another masterpiece. You do, in fact, mention a new book in your postscript; I can well imagine the present stage of 1,000,000 notes: [somebody should] give you a good shaking now and then and make you put those notes on the boil.

My rooms in Kensington have been vacated, by reason of the housekeeper having gone North. I get pretty desperate about doing any connected work. It's hard when one isn't, as they say, "living one's own little life," with the local church and the Stanhope Arms to drop into and the newsagent and tobacconist to chat with. However. Well, I can't do much to help at this distance, so will close, but hoping you will write again, am your faithful admirer.

London
May 3, 1948

DEAR DJUNA:

I sent you a long cable today, having returned from France and been shown your letter by John Hayward [a close friend of Eliot's], who expressed his disapproval of my inefficiency in quite certain terms. Oh dear I am sorry. The parcels did arrive, of course. And oh dear, I did think I had answered your letter; and I have left everything undone; and here we have been eating the rice and the macaroni and everything else and everything short of biting the hand that fed me. Well it would serve me right to starve. But I hope nevertheless you will lunch or dine

TULLIO PERICOLI

with me early in October: I shall be quite near to Patchin Place, in Princeton, New Jersey, and I should think I ought to be able to slip away from the atom-bombers etc. now and then and turn up punctually at the Lafayette. How are you my dear Djuna and are you getting anything written or are you painting. I have just come from France drinking pastis with the mayors of villages in the Basses-Alpes but it was really work as I had to lecture and speak too, and I am very hoarse because it is difficult talking French with false teeth when you are not used to it. Do write and say I can look you in the face again in four months time, my dear Djuna there is nobody I would not rather have treated in this base way rather than yourself and there you are I am sure not eating enough yourself and everything so expensive in New York, and sign myself, with much love, yours humbly.

New York
May 8, 1948

DEAREST TOM:

I *have* made a lot of trouble.

I would feel considerably sorrier about the whole thing except that it brought me two of the most charming letters, yours and [John Hayward's], and a kind and far too abashed cable. I'm delighted with both of you!! The morning the cable arrived it went thus: Knock on door (eight A.M., should have been awake as I usually am at about six)

"*What* is it?"

"Telegram lady."

"Put it under the door."

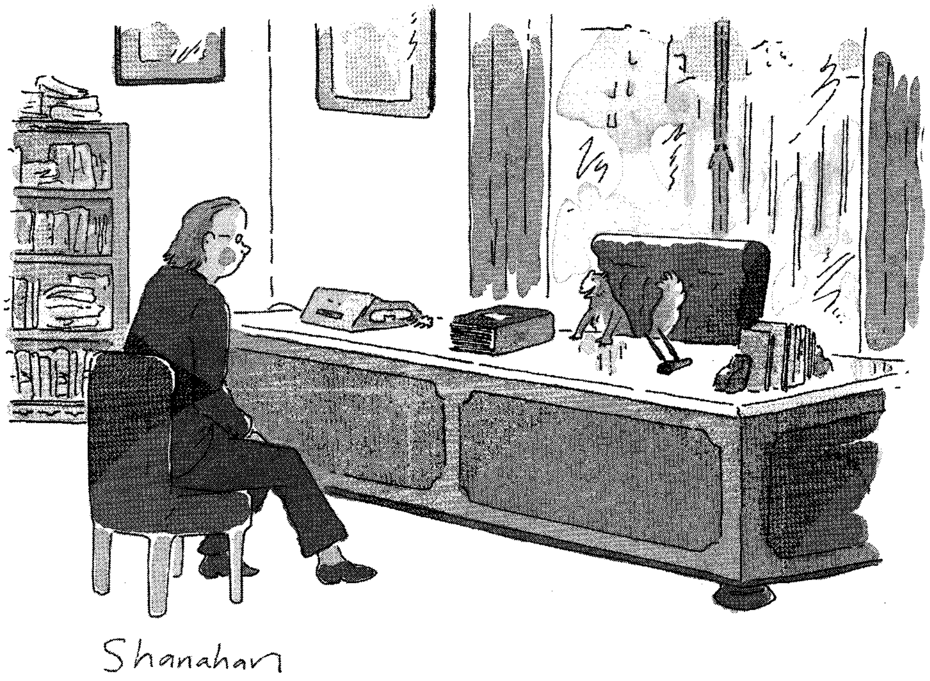
"Oh no madame, you'd be deprived."

"I'd be *what*." (rising on elbow)

"To lose a moment would deprive you madame from reading one of the nicest telegrahms I've ever had to deliver—right nice and amiable, and all the way from overseas too."

I get up, open the door, seize the envelope, as now I judge it's from you, and raise my eyes about three feet nine from the floor to see a little stooped man in a duster looking absolutely beatific. "It's a delight lady" he says, delicately transporting my dime into the shades. "Don't recall ever having delivered a better, anywhere—" he sweeps an arm toward the horizon, and is gone. You see, I was for some months in the dark, but now it's very bright, and thank you Tom for being such a darling when it was brought to your notice.

Until October then, and take care of yourself, as well as you can. I hope your teeth have by now got round to being glad of your company. Mr. Hayward tells me you are writing another play. I pick up *Time* magazine and read: "Poet-Dramatist T. S. Eliot, who is working on a new play, explained all about it to a reporter who asked what the subject was. 'Why, you see,' said Eliot, 'in the play I study the relations of certain characters with other characters and of certain characters with themselves.' "



"I love your novel, and I feel that it would make excellent nesting material."

May 9, 1949

DEAREST TOM:

Thank you for paying May. But *why* didn't you send me a sort of list of what kinds of things you most need?

Of course I am enchanted to hear about "Nightwood," particularly to hear that you are going to print the introduction, and with an added statement that you are still of the same mind. I do not know if you know it, but you and that book and that foreword are the three only things that have pleased me in ten, twelve, years. I am getting a slight pleasure in writing out the new play, but also some terror. I am not sure if keeping notes is a wise measure or an evil. In the first fire one has some measure of the weight and value of a thought; on the four hundred hundred reading, you are not at all sure that it is your own or if it is, if you care to admit it.

Do you want Kool's (cigarettes your Dr. suggested for your throat) if I can get them through to you?

August 19, 1949

DEAREST DJUNA:

Oh dear, I have been ungrateful and ungracious, but this has been a hell of a summer. You, however, are kind and tolerant. Yes, I have to thank you for two cartons of KOOLS (how I hate those bloody little facetious penguins, but the cigarettes suit my throat better than Chesterfields) and for a most valuable parcel of macaroni, rice, and other good things. I ought to have written to say that I am HAPPY to go on paying for your furniture (it is a kind of assurance that you will come back some day and wear it out yourself) but *don't* exaggerate the responsibility on your part, because my dear Djuna it is important that YOU should Eat as well as I; and after all I am fairly well off at present in the debased currency of this island, and I shan't starve relatively to the other inhabitants and if we all starve together well that is more just and proper than your starving in the midst of plutocratic manual workers who can buy all the beefsteaks they want when you can't.

And *now:* Sell any part of the Work in Progress you can, and get the highest price you can. It won't hurt anybody; we can always say it's good advance publicity. Don't be overscrupulous—merely make them pay a little more for it than they offer. What is *Mademoiselle*? It sounds pornographic. Never mind. Elevate the pornographs.

I'm in a rush at the moment: off to Edinburgh tomorrow, where my new play ("The Cocktail Party" is the name of it, but that's only what I call it in order to entice the public—the esoteric name is "Upadhammam samuppada," but nobody would promote a play with a name like that). Well, we'll see.

September 16, 1949

DEAREST TOM:

It is plainly a marvel that you got *anything* done aside from the play and its rehearsal. Gracious, I had no idea that it was on until I heard from you.

Tom, the magazine *Mademoiselle* (I enclose a page with little stamp-sized picture of you etc.) is most emphatically *not* pornographic. It is the middle-classes *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* sort of thing, strictly for the sweet young girl not over seventeen, and never likely to be, and her interests—clothes, "charm," and so forth. Here you are off to Germany, with three new lectures. I wish you could sit down and "rest your hands" as one radio commentator has it.

Dearest Tom, I *know* you don't want to "make money from me," you nevertheless have to eat, and by the spareness of your figure I should say you don't exactly need the Roman couch and side-bowl, for I see in your Harvard report (1910 class, 25th anniversary), snatched out of the files by a wretched young man who I had to toss out of my "rooms" (one and a half with closet, bath, and a kitchen you could put in your pocket) as he was too positive that a "genius" like myself would be interested in his career which he considered less than nothing, that you have "only put on seven pounds in 25 years." Well, the point is I worry, not knowing how things stand with you and the larder.

Wonderful good news about the reception of your play. I am up to *here* in mine. Notes all over the floor and absolutely no idea what to do for action . . . how *does* one get action into a play?

July 15, 1954

DEAREST TOM:

By the same mail I am sending you a copy of my play, "The Antiphon." I think more effort has gone into it than anything I have done. I tried to meet your deadline of March eight (Why March eight?) but could not make it. The spelling is probably bad, the punctuation I know is ghastly. I tried to learn, with the help of Fowler, but never having been to school, and therefore having the language purely by ear, I found that I would never learn in time. Will you see what you can do about this, a most important matter, particularly for a work in verse. Please feel free to be quite ruthless. About my work I have little personal vanity, and what I have I should certainly disregard. The play's the thing!

I do hope you are fit again. Forgive me any and all annoyance I have caused you.

December 19, 1954

DEAREST DJUNA:

This is again an interim letter, but also for the season, to send my Christmas greetings, and to let you know that you are far from forgotten. I cannot find words to describe the kind of impression that "The Antiphon" has been making. It has now been read by six readers—no, seven readers have given it their close attention—and the effects vary from enthusiasm, through qualified enthusiasm, to complete stupefaction. I don't know quite what I think or feel, myself, yet. The first two acts so far get me nowhere, the third act is immensely active—some sort of explosion of nuclear fission seems to take place in which language disintegrates into some sort of primitive constituents of violent energy. What can be done about it? Only God knows, so far. But there will have to be more readings and readers. Meanwhile, I send my warm affection and fervid amazement.

June 14, 1956

TOM DEAR:

Yesterday I received Mr. Hayward's reassuring cable that all is well with you—I was most alarmed having wakened to the radio (I had forgotten to turn it off) blaring in my ear early in the morning, thus waking me, that T. S. Eliot had been taken from the liner Queen Elizabeth to the hospital, which accounts for my hurried wire to Mr. Hayward.

So I mailed you the last cut copy of "The Antiphon"—that just made, with a memory of the reading in Cambridge on the 21st of May.

I wish you to have a good lazy time in the Alps, or wherever it is you intend going in July. I wish you could stop worrying. I love you heartily, and am praying for you and your new play.

August 10, 1956

DEAREST DJUNA:

You have, I fear, been called upon to have the patience of Job with me and with "The Antiphon." July is always a crowded month at best, and what with arrears accumulated during my absence in America, and then two weeks' illness, I have been rather overwhelmed, but I have at last been through your revised copy, cut after the Poets' Theatre reading. I am afraid I feel strongly that Act Two needs still more cutting. It is, in any case, disproportionately long. Don't cut anything at the beginning, and don't cut anything at the end, but I feel sure there are pages in the middle which can be disposed of. I know it is painful to sacrifice what one feels to be good lines, but you had to cut a good deal, you will remember, out of "Nightwood," stuff which was quite good enough to stay in, except that there was *too much of it*, and with a play, still more than with prose fiction form, it is undesirable far to overstep the limits of the essential. Will you have another shot at it?

November 8, 1956

DEAREST DJUNA:

I am now able to tell you that the Board have accepted "The Antiphon," in this latest version, on my advice. It is quite impossible to say what the market for this work will be, or how many copies we ought to print. There is no precedent in any publisher's experience which would throw the faintest ray of light on this dark problem, so we are proposing merely a straight ten per cent and, of course, if the book takes on like wildfire, I promise you that I will use my best endeavours to persuade my Board to improve the terms at a later stage.

January 5, 1965

DEAR VALERIE:

Your gentle devotion and care, not only pillowed Tom's decline, but lessens our dismay on hearing of his death, as it must lessen yours.

He had full life, great honours, and thanks God, someone (when he most needed it) who "liked him and his work." A quotation from his reply when (you being out of the room for a moment), I had said "She is gentle to you." He threw his head up, and almost shouting cried: "I'm the luckiest, the very luckiest man on earth."

I am glad we exchanged Christmas greetings. ♦

LETTERS

INTERPRETATION

BY BORIS PASTERNAK

Edmund Wilson reviewed "Doctor Zhivago" in The New Yorker in 1958, declaring that the book was "one of the great events in man's literary and moral history." But he also noted that it was full of recurring coincidences, and that, while the events in it seemed real, it wasn't actually a realistic novel. Seven months later, Wilson discovered that it was "studded with symbols and significant puns," and wrote a lengthy article about its hidden system of meaning for Encounter, then edited by Stephen Spender. The following letter, written in English, is Boris Pasternak's response, published here for the first time and edited with the assistance of the Pasternak Trust.

August 22, 1959

DEAR MR. SPENDER:

It is a great pleasure, honor, and thrill for me to write to you. But I am aware of the onus that will fall on the person you will entrust with my letter to discover the sense in its gibberish—and transform it into English if it is to be used for a literary purpose.

I have no other debts to pay to Mr. Edmund Wilson except my gratitude and admiration. It is every critic's right to detail the impression produced on him by a work of art—in his preferred or customary manner. I, too, am asked to write prefaces and introductions to editions of Blok (in Italy), of Tolstoy and Lermontov (in America), of Chekhov (in India).

But I am no explorer, no erudite. I have read very little in my life, and what I have read I have for the most part forgotten. For all those prefaces and introductions, I shall confine myself to short letters—conveying only my general subjective ideas, just as Mr. Wilson has done in my case.

For instance, this is what I might say of Chekhov: that his singularity as a playwright lies in this—that he inscribed man in the landscape on equal terms with trees and clouds; that as a dramatist he was against overrating the social and the human; that the dialogue in his plays does not obey any logic of motivation, passion, plot, or character, but that, rather, the cues and speeches are snatched out of the atmosphere as they are spoken—natural effects like the spots and strokes of a forest or meadow—in order to render the spontaneous texture of life. This is the life that is the play's subject—life in its broadest sense as a unique, vast, inhabited frame, with all its symmetries and dissymmetries, proportions and disproportions. Life as the hidden, mysterious principle of the whole.

If Chekhov were alive and read these words, would he agree? Why should not Mr. Wilson be allowed the same license that I allow myself?

But I don't believe that peripheral details of interpretation are as important as Mr. Wilson thinks. Rather, their relative unimportance has a special, deliberate meaning for me. This unimportance is central to my language—the real tongue of my thought.

When we consider the great novels of the last century—their essence extolled and idolized by Henry James; when we examine the great works of Dostoyevski, Tolstoy, Dickens, and Flaubert; and when, from the fabric of a "Madame Bovary," we take the following, one by one: characters, their development, situations, plot, subject, content—after such a subtraction, a second-rate literature of entertainment will have nothing left. But a "Madame Bovary" (or a "David Copperfield," say) will still retain the cardinal thing—the characterization of reality almost as a philosophical entity, universally shared, experienced by us all as a changeless companion.

To this reality as shared background the nineteenth century applied the incontestable doctrine of causality. It believed that the objective world was ruled by an iron chain of cause and effect; the moral and material world was subordinate to the laws of consequence and retribution. The more inflexible an author was in illustrating these [laws] and their consequences, the greater the realist he was judged to be. The tragic, bewitching spell of Flaubert or Maupassant is rooted in the irrevocable nature of their narratives, which are like verdicts or sentences, beyond reprieve.

However, I have always been struck by the sense that existence was more inexplicable than any of its individually astonishing incidents. I was attracted by the unusualness of the usual. The supreme pleasure consists in capturing the *taste* of reality, in successfully rendering the *atmosphere of being*. Which is the ambience, the surrounding whole, the total environment.

But here is a paradox. While I pondered the problem of capturing this sense of circumambient reality in art, the outcome was, if not diametrically opposed to the masterpieces of the nineteenth century, at least significantly different from them.

My sense of reality—the whole—has always been this: that there is a purpose, an end, a *telos*, a reached sending. Why? An inadequate knowledge of the external impulses that produce subjective sense data in us? An aftertaste of creation myths? A sense of the magnitude on either side of birth and death? Whatever the cause, reality has been for me like a sudden, unexpected arrival that is intensely welcome. I have always tried to reproduce this sense of being sent, of being launched.

This is the only thing I would want to add to any allegorically oriented criticism of my work, not in opposition to it. Behind and beyond all these highlighted and emphasized trifles (even in their sharpened magic), and in addition to the described human fates and historical events, there is an effort in my novel to represent the whole sequence (facts, beings, happenings) as a great moving entity—a developing, passing, rolling, rushing inspiration. As if reality itself had freedom of choice, a self-composed configuration of innumerable variants and versions.

Hence the reproach that my characters were insufficiently realized. Rather than delineate, I was trying to efface them. Hence the frank arbitrariness of the "coincidences." Here I wanted to show the unrestrained freedom of life, its very verisimilitude contiguous with improbability.

It is too rash, perhaps, and silly to send you this uncorrected, pell-mell letter, unread and unrevised. Only my haste can justify it. ♦

Boris Pasternak (opposite) at his dacha at Peredelkino, 1958. Photograph by Cornell Capa.

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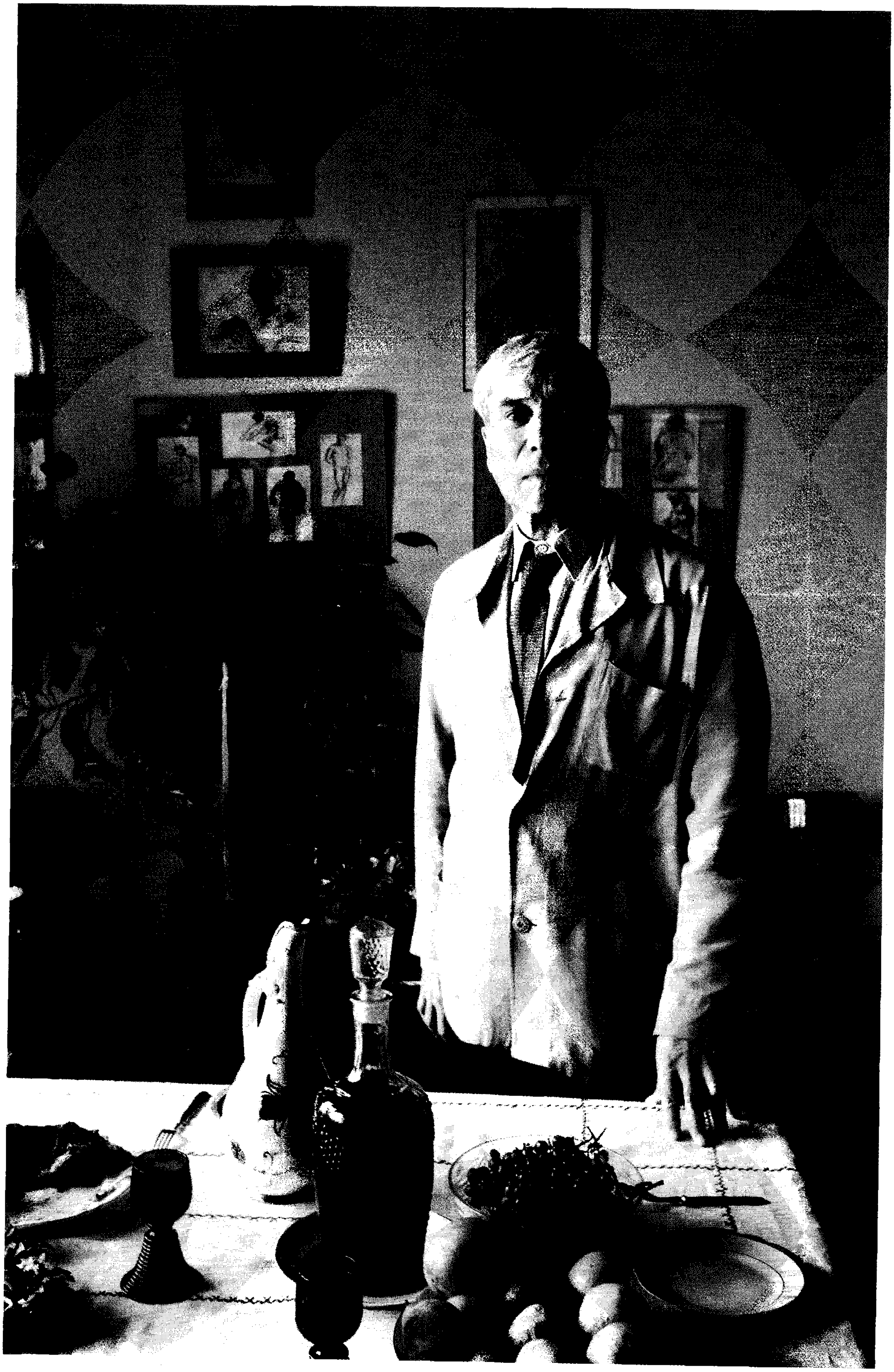


FICTION

MISERERE

A memory becomes an obsession.

BY ROBERT STONE

MARY URQUHART had just finished story hour at the library when the muted phone rang at the circulation desk. She had been reading the children "Prince Caspian."

Camille Innaurato was on the line and as usual she was beside herself.

"Mary, Mary, so listen . . ." Camille began. It sounded almost prayerful. Then Camille began to hyperventilate.

"Oh, Camille," Mrs. Urquhart said. "Try to be calm. Are you all right, dear? Do you have your inhaler?"

"I have more!" Camille croaked fiercely at last. The force of the words in her constricted throat made her sound, Mary Urquhart thought, like her counterpart in "Traviata."

"More?" Although Mary knew at once what Camille meant, she needed the extra moment of freedom.

"More babies!" Camille shouted. She spoke so loudly that even with the receiver as close to her ear as she could bear, Mary Urquhart thought that everyone around the circulation desk must be able to hear her voice on the phone, its unsound passion.

"My brother, he found them!" cried Camille. "And he took them here. So I got them now."

"I see," said Mary Urquhart.

Outside, Mrs. Carter, the African-American head librarian, was supervising the reuniting of the story-hour children with their mothers. The children were, without exception, black and Hispanic. The mothers of the black children were mostly West Indian domestics; they were the most scrupulous of the story-hour mothers and they loved their children to have English stories, British stories.

"Mary . . ." Camille gasped over the phone. "Mary?"

Outside the library windows, in the darkening winter afternoon, the children looked lively and happy and well behaved and Mary was proud of them. The mothers were smiling and Mrs. Carter, too.

"Easy does it," said Mary Urquhart to her friend Camille. For years after Mary had stopped drinking, she had driven about with a bumper sticker to that effect. Embarrassing to consider now.

"You'll come, Mary? You could come today? Soon? And we could do it?"

The previous year Mrs. Urquhart had bought little books of C. S. Lewis tales with her own money for the children to take home. That way at least some might learn to read them. She liked to meet the mothers herself and talk with them. Looking on wistfully, she wished herself out on the sidewalk, too, if only to say hello and remind herself of everyone's name. But Mrs. Carter was the chief librarian and preëmpted the privilege of overseeing the dismissal of story hour.

"Yes, dear," Mary said to Camille. "I'll come as soon as we close."

They closed within the hour because the New Jersey city in which Mary worked had scant funds to spare for libraries. It was largely a city of racial minorities, in the late stages of passing from the control of a corrupt white political machine to that of a corrupt black one. Its schools were warrens of pathology and patronage. Its police, still mainly white, were frequently criminals.

Mary Urquhart looked carefully about her as she went out the door into the library parking lot for the walk to her old station wagon. It was nearly night, though a faint stain of the day persisted. At the western horizon, across the river and over the stacks and gables of the former mills, hung a brilliant patch of clear night sky where Venus blazed. Some of the newer street lights around the library's block were broken, their fixtures torn away by junkies for sale to scrap dealers. There were patchy reefs and banks of soiled frozen snow on the ground. Not much had fallen for a week, but the weather was bitter and the north-facing curbs and margins were still partly covered.

"Thou fair-haired angel of the evening," Mary recited silently to the first star. She could not keep the line from her mind.

Temple Street, the road Mary drove toward the strip that led her home, was one of crumbling wooden houses. In some of them, bare lights glowed behind gypsy-colored bedspreads tacked over the taped windows. About every fifth house was derelict and inside some of these candlelight was already flickering. They were crack houses. Mary had worked as an enumerator in the neighborhood during the last census and, for all its transience, she knew it fairly well. Many of the houses were in worse condition inside than out. The official census description for all of them was "Dilapidated." A few of her story children lived on the street.

The odd corner had a bodega in a cinder-block building with a faint neon beer sign in its window. The cold had driven the brown-bagging drinkers away from the little strip mall that housed Mashona's Beauty Shoppe, a cheap lamp store, and a take-out ribs joint called Floyd's, which kept erratic hours. All the shops closed at dusk and God knew, she thought, where the alcoholics had gone—maybe out of the bitter wind into the crack houses. Mary knew a lot of the older alcoholics who hung out there by sight and sometimes, in daytime, she stopped for Floyd's ribs, which were not at all bad. Floyd, who always had a smile for her, kept a sign over his register that read "Christ Is The Answer."

She had an ongoing dialogue with a few of the men. Those who would speak to a middle-aged white woman like herself called her "Mary" and sometimes, in the case of the beat old-timers from down home, "Miss Mary." She had begun by addressing them all as "sir," but she had soon perceived that this offended them as patronizing and was not appropriate to street banter. So, if she did not know them by name, she addressed them as "guy," which amused them. It was how her upper-class Southern husband had addressed his social equals. He had used it long before one heard it commonly; he had been dead for thirteen years.

"I know your story, guy," she would say to a brown-bagging acquaintance as she carried her paper container of ribs to the car. "I'm a juicehead. I'm a boozer."

"But you gotta enjoy your life, Mary," an old man had said to her once. "You ain't got but one, chere?"

And that had stopped her cold.

"But that's it," she had told the man. "You're so right."

He had shaken his head, telling her really, well, she'd never understand. Her life and his? But she'd persisted.

"That's why I don't have my bottle today, as you do. Because there was a time, guy. Yes, you best believe it."

Then he'd heard her vestigial Southernness and cocked his head and said, in a distinctly sarcastic but not altogether unfriendly way, "Do it right, Mary. You say so."

"God bless, guy."

"Be right, Mary."

Poor fellow, she'd thought. Who was he? Who might he have become? She wished him grace.

A short distance before Temple Street doglegged into the strip of Route 4, it passed the dangerous side of a city park in which there was a large lake. The cold weather had frozen the lake to a depth that Mary knew must be many feet. After the cold weeks they'd had, it must be safe for skating. In some towns there would be lights by the lakeside and skating children; not in this one. And for that she could only be grateful, because she did not think she could bear the sight of children skating or lights on the icy surface of a frozen lake. Even after the thirteen years.

Along its last quarter mile, Temple Street acquired an aluminum guardrail and some halogen overhead lights, though on these, too, the metal was torn up, unscrewed, pried loose by the locust-junkies.

At the light that marked the intersection with Route 4 stood a large gas station. It was one of a number owned by

MARLENE DUMAS, "BEFORE LIFE," 1989 COURTESY OF GALERIE PAUL ANDRIESSE, AMSTERDAM

"Promise me, son, that you'll never have anything to do with book publishing."

• •

an immigrant from India. Once the immigrant himself had worked in it; then he'd bought it, then bought others and real estate to go with them. Now he employed other Indian immigrants who worked long shifts, day and night. In the previous twelve months, according to the county newspaper, no fewer than four of the immigrants had been shot dead in holdups and another four wounded.

Mary waited at the light, and it was really easier to think about the poor slaughtered Gujaratis than about the frozen lake. She prayed for them, in her way, eyes focussed on the turn signal. It did not suit her to utter repetitions. Rather the words came to her on all the music she had heard, so many settings, that prayer sung over and over since the beginning of music itself:

> *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,*
> *Miserere nobis.*

Then there was Route 4, the American Strip. And this was New Jersey, where she had ended up, its original home and place of incubation, whence it had been nourished to creep out and girdle the world. It had come in time to her own stately corner of North Carolina, looking absolutely the same.

Since her widowhood and recovery, Mary Urquhart had lived in a modest house in what had once been a suburb of this New Jersey city, only a few blocks beyond its formal border. At the suburban end of her street was a hill from which the towers of Manhattan were visible on the clearer mornings. All day and most of the night, planes on a southward descent for Newark passed overhead and, even after so many years, often woke her.

But Mary was not, that afternoon, on her way home. A mile short of the city line, she pulled off Route 4 onto Imperial Avenue. The avenue led to a neighborhood called Auburn Hill, which had become an Italian enclave in the Spanish-speaking section of the ghetto. Auburn Hill could be relied upon for neat lawns and safe streets, their security reinforced by grim anecdotes of muggers' and housebreakers' summary punishments. Young outlaws nailed to tar rooftops with screwdrivers. Or thrown from an overpass onto the Jersey Central tracks fifty feet below. At Christmastime, the neighborhood sparkled with cheery lights. Mary had come to know it well and, comprehending both the bitter and the sweet of Auburn Hill, was fond of it.

Camille Innaurato's was like the other houses in that end of town. It was a brick, three-bedroom single-story with aluminum siding and a narrow awning of the same. It had a small lawn in front, surrounded by a metal fence, and a garden in the back where Camille grew tomatoes and peppers in season.

When Mary pulled into the driveway, she saw Camille's pale, anxious face at the picture window. Camille was mouthing words, clasping her hands. In a moment she opened the door to the winter wind, as Mary emerged from her car and locked it.

"Oh, Mary. I'm thanking God Almighty you could come. Yeah, I'm thanking Him."

Camille was one of those women who had grown older in unquestioning service to their aged parents. She had helped raise her younger brother. Later she had shared with her father the care of her sick mother. Then, when he died, she had assumed it all—her mother, the house, everything. Camille worked in a garment-sewing shop that had set itself up on two floors of a former silk mill; she oversaw the Chinese and Salvadoran women employed there.

Her younger brother, August, was technically a policeman, though not an actively corrupt one. In fact, he had no particular constabulary duties. The family had had enough political connections to secure him a clerical job with the department. He was a timid, excitable man, married, with grown children, who lived with his domineering wife in an outer suburb. But as a police insider he knew the secrets of the city.

The Innauratos, brother and sister, had inherited nothing from their parents except the house Camille occupied and their sick mother's tireless piety.

Mary Urquhart stepped inside and took Camille by the shoulders and looked at her.

"Now, Camille, dear, are you all right? Can you breathe?"

She inspected Camille and, satisfied with her friend's condition, checked out the house. The living room was neat enough, although the television set was off, a sure sign of Camille's preoccupation.

"I gotta show you, Mary. Oh I gotta show you. Yeah I gotta." She sounded as though she were weeping, but the beautiful dark eyes she fixed on Mary were dry. Eyes out of Alexandrian portraiture, Mary thought, sparkling and shimmering with their infernal vision. For a moment it seemed she had returned from some transport. She gathered Mary to her large, soft, barren breast. "You wanna coffee, Mary honey? You wanna bis*cote*? A little wine?"

In her excitement, Camille always offered the wine when there were babies, forgetting Mary could not drink it.

"I'll get you a glass of wine," Mary suggested. "And I'll get myself coffee."

Camille looked after Mary anxiously as she swept past her toward the kitchen.

"Sit down, dear," Mary told her. "Sit down and I'll bring it out."

Slowly, anxiously, Camille seated herself on the edge of the sofa and looked at the blank television screen.

In the immaculate kitchen, Mary found an open bottle of sangiovese, unsoured, drinkable. She poured out a glass, then served herself a demitasse of fresh-made espresso from Camille's machine. In the cheerless, spotless living room, they drank side by side on the faded floral sofa, among the lace and the pictures of Camille's family and the portrait photograph of the Pope.

"I used to love sangiovese," Mary said, watching her friend sip. "The wine of the Romagna. Bologna. Urbino."

"It's good," Camille said.

"My husband and I and the children once stayed in a villa outside Urbino. It rained. Yes, every day, but the mountains were grand. And the hill towns down in Umbria. We had great fun."

"You saw the Holy Father?"

Mary laughed. "We were all good Protestants then."

Camille looked at her in wonder, though she had heard the story of Mary's upbringing many times. Then her face clouded.

"You gotta see the babies, Mary."

"Yes," Mary sighed. "But do finish your wine."

When the wine was done they both went back to look at the fetuses. There were four. Camille had laid them on a tarpaulin, under a churchy purple curtain on the floor of an enclosed, unheated back porch, where it was nearly as cold as the night outside. On top of the curtain she had rested one of her wall crucifixes.

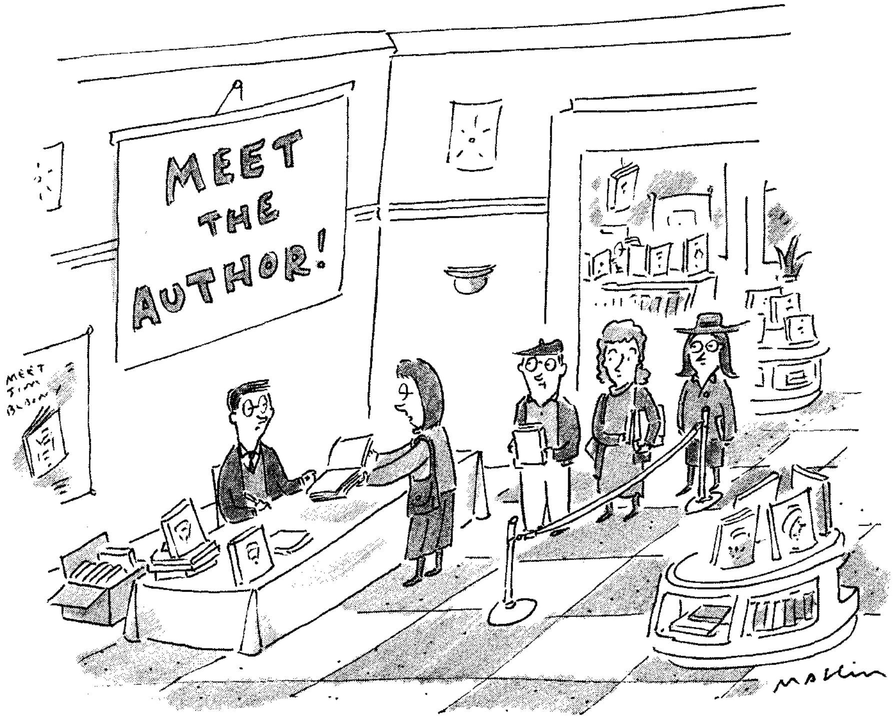
Mary lifted the curtain and looked at the little dead things on the floor. They had lobster-claw, unseparated fingers, and one had a face. Its face looked like a Florida manatee's, Mary thought. It was the only living resemblance she could bring to bear—a manatee, bovine, slope-browed. One was still enveloped in some kind of fibrous membrane that suggested bat wings.

"So sweet," Camille sobbed. "So sad. Who could do such a thing? A murderer!" She bit her thumb. "A murderer, the degenerate fuck, his eyes should be plucked out!" She made the sign of the cross, to ask forgiveness for her outburst.

"Little lamb, who made thee?" Mary Urquhart asked wearily. The things were so disgusting. "Well, to work then."

Camille's brother August had discovered that the scavenger company that handled the county's medical waste also serviced its abortion clinics, which had no incinerators of their own. The fetuses were stored for disposal along with everything else. August had fixed it with the scavengers to report specimens and set them aside. He would pass on the discovery to Camille. Then Camille and a friend—most often Mary—would get to work.

Mary knew a priest named Father Hooke, the pastor of a parish in a wealthy community in the Ramapos. They had known each other for years. Hooke had been, in a somewhat super-



"Could you write, 'To Penny, my darling ex-wife, who nurtured me and supported me all through my struggles as a fledgling writer, and whom I blew off the minute I had my first big success.' "

ficial way, Mary's spiritual counsellor. He was much more cultivated than most priests and could be wickedly witty, too. Their conversations about contemporary absurdities, Scripture, and the vagaries of the Canon, history, and literature had helped her through the last stage of her regained abstinence. She knew of Julian of Norwich through his instruction. He had received her into the Catholic Church and she had been a friend to him. Lately, though, there had been tension between them. She used Camille's telephone to alert him.

"Frank," she said to the priest, "we have some children."

He gave her silence in return.

"Hello, Frank," she said again. "Did you hear me, Father? I said we have some children."

"Yes," said Hooke, in what Mary was coming to think of as his affected tone, "I certainly heard you the first time. Tonight is . . . difficult."

"Yes, it surely is," Mary said. "Difficult and then some. When will you expect us?"

"I've been meaning," Hooke said, "to talk about this before now."

He had quoted Dame Julian to her. "All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well." Those were lines he liked.

"Have you?" she inquired politely. "I see. We can talk after the interment."

"You know, Mary," Father Hooke said with a nervous laugh, "the bishop, that pillar of intellect, our spiritual prince, has been hearing things that trouble him."

Mary Urquhart blushed to hear the priest's lie.

"The bishop," she told him, "is not a problem in any way. You are."

"Me?" he laughed then, genuinely and bitterly. "I'm a problem? Oh, sorry. There are also a few laws . . ."

"What time, Father? Camille works for a living. So do I."

"The thing is," Father Hooke said, "you ought not to come tonight."

"Oh, Frank," Mary said. "Really, really. Don't be a little boy on me. Take up your cross, guy."

"I suppose," Hooke said, "I can't persuade you to pass on this one?"

"Shame on you, Frank Hooke," she said.

THE drive to the clean outer suburbs led through subdivisions and parklands, then to thick woods among which colonial houses stood, comfortably lighted against the winter night. Finally there were a few farms, or estates laid out to resemble working farms. The woods were full of frozen lakes and ponds.

The Buick wagon Mary drove was almost fifteen years old, the same one she had owned in the suburbs of Boston as a youngish mother, driving all the motherly routes, taking Charles Junior to soccer practice and Payton to girls' softball and little Emily to play school.

The fetuses were secured with blind cord in the back of the station wagon, between the tarp and the curtain in which Camille had wrapped them. It was a cargo that did not shift or rattle and they had not tried to put a crucifix on top. More and more, the dark countryside they rode through resembled the town where she had lived with Charles and her children.

"Could you say the poem?" Camille asked. When they went on an interment Camille liked to hear Mary recite poetry for her as they drove. Mary preferred poetry to memorized prayer, and the verse was always new to Camille. It made her cry, and crying herself out on the way to an interment, Mary had observed, best prepared Camille for the work at hand.

"But which poem, Camille?"

Sometimes Mary recited Crashaw's "To the Infant Martyrs," or from his hymn to St. Teresa. Sometimes she recited Vaughan or Blake.

"The one with the star," Camille said. "The one with the lake."

"Oh," Mary said cheerfully. "Funny, I was thinking about it earlier."

Once, she could not imagine how, Mary had recited Blake's "To the Evening Star" for Camille. It carried such a weight of pain for her that she dreaded its every line and trembled when it came to her unsummoned:

Thou fair-hair'd angel of the evening,
Now, whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light
Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!

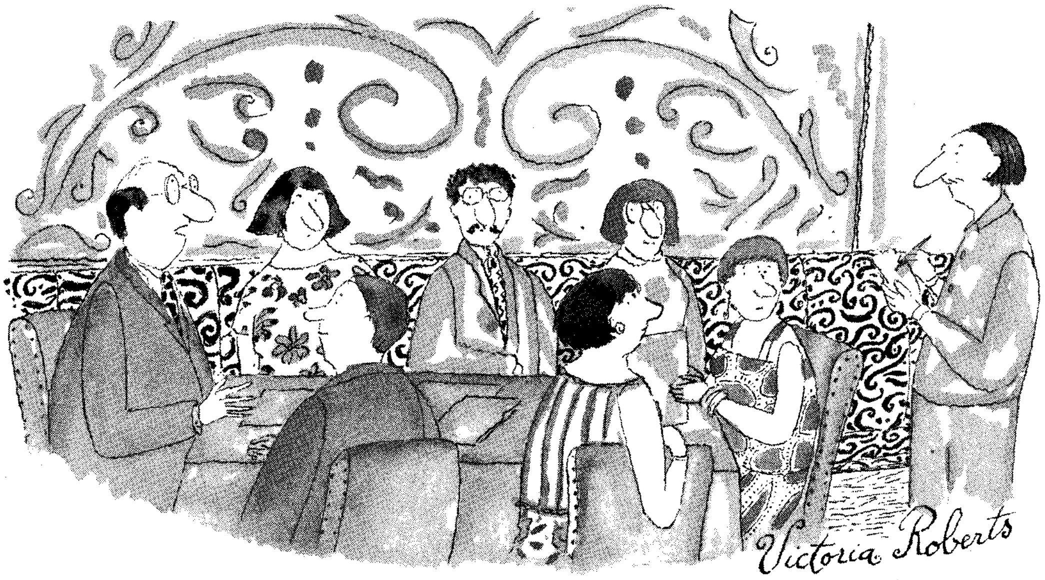
It had almost killed her to recite it the first time, because that had been her and Charles's secret poem, their prayer for the protection that was not forthcoming. The taste of it in her mouth was of rage unto madness and the lash of grief and above all of whiskey to drown it all, whiskey to die in and be with them. That night, driving, with the dark dead creatures at their back, she offered up the suffering in it.

Camille wept at the sound of the words. Mary found herself unable to go on for a moment.

"There's more," Camille said.

"Yes," said Mary. She drew upon her role as story lady.

Let thy west wind sleep on
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,



"I'll just have a Diet Coke. I'm in the middle of my novel."

And wash the dusk with silver.
Soon, full soon,
Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages wide,
And the lion glares thro' the dun forest:
The fleeces of our flocks are cover'd with
Thy sacred dew: protect them with thine influence.

Camille sobbed. "Oh, Mary," she said. "Yours weren't protected."

"Well, stars . . ." Mary Urquhart said, still cheerfully. "Thin influence. Thin ice."

The parlor lights were lighted in the rectory of Our Lady of Fatima when they pulled off the genteel main street of the foothill town and into the church parking lot. Mary parked the station wagon close to the rectory door, and the two women got out and rang Father Hooke's bell.

Hooke came to the door in a navy cardigan, navy-blue shirt, and chinos. Camille murmured and fairly curtsied in deference. Mary looked the priest up and down. His casual getup seemed like recalcitrance, an unreadiness to officiate. Had he been working himself up to deny them?

"Hello, Frank," said Mary. "Sorry to come so late."

Hooke was alone in the rectory. There was no assistant and he did his own housekeeping, resident rectory biddies being a thing of the past.

"Can I give you coffee?" Father Hooke asked.

"I've had mine," Mary said.

He had a slack, uneasy smile. "Mary," the priest said. "And Miss . . . won't you sit down?"

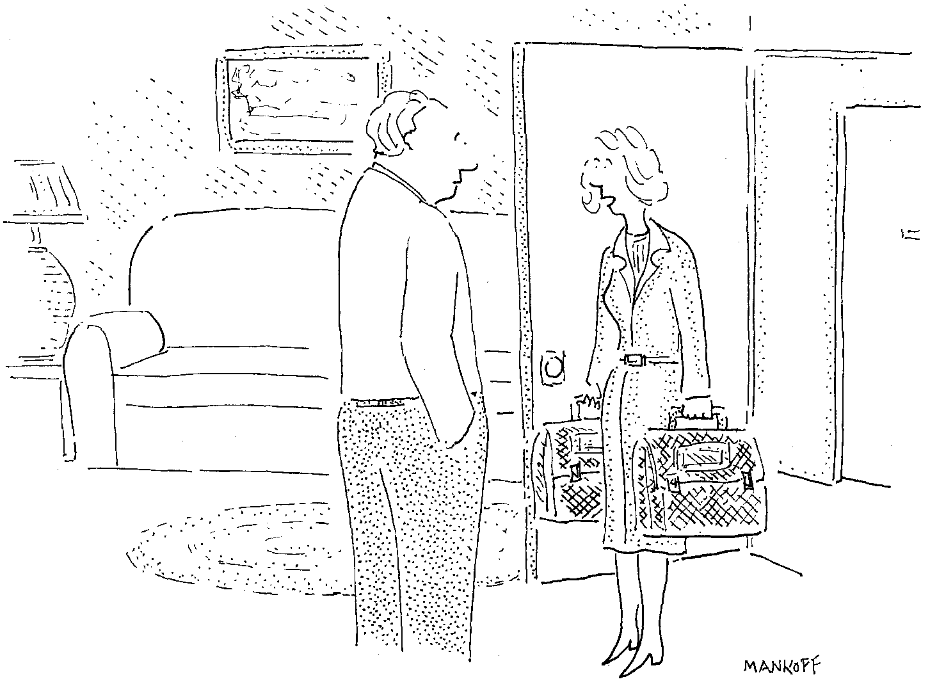
He had forgotten Camille's name. He was a snob, she thought, a suburban snob. The ethnic, mariolatrous name of his parish, Our Lady of Fatima, embarrassed him. "Father," she said, "why don't we just do it?"

He stared at her helplessly. Ashamed for him, she avoided his eye.

"I think," he said, dry-throated, "we should consider from now on."

"Isn't it strange?" she asked Camille. "I had an odd feeling we might have a problem here tonight." She turned on Hooke. "What do you mean? Consider what?"

"All right, all right," he said. A surrender in the pursuit of least resistance. "Where is it?"



"I'm sorry, Dave, but our marriage has lost its narrative flow."

• •

"They," Mary said.

"The babies," said Camille. "The poor babies are in Mary's car outside."

But he hung back. "Oh, Mary," Father Hooke said. He seemed childishly afraid.

She burned with rage. Was there such a thing as an adult Catholic? And the race of priests, she thought, these self-indulgent, boneless men. "Oh, dear," she said. "What can be the matter now? Afraid of how they're going to look?"

"Increasingly . . ." Father Hooke said, "I feel we're doing something wrong."

"Really?" Mary asked politely. "Is that a fact?" They stood on the edge of the nice red Bolivian rectory carpet, in the posture of setting out for the station wagon. Yet not setting out. There was Haitian art on the wall. No lace curtains here. "What a shame," she said, "we haven't time for an evening of theological discourse."

"We may have to make time," Father Hooke said. "Sit down, girls."

Camille looked to Mary for reassurance and sat with absurd decorousness on the edge of a bare-boned Spanish chair. Mary stood where she was. The priest glanced at her in dread. Having given them an order, he seemed afraid to take a seat himself.

"It isn't just the interments," he told Mary. He ignored Camille. "It's the whole thing. Our whole position." He shuddered and began to pace up and down on the rug, his hands working nervously.

"Our position," Mary repeated tonelessly. "Do you mean *your* position? Are you referring to the Church's teaching?"

"Yes," he said. He looked around as though for help, but as was the case so often with such things, it was not available. "I mean I think we may be wrong."

She let the words reverberate in the rectory silence. Then she asked, "Prodded by conscience, are you? Father?"

"I think we're wrong on this," he said with sudden force. "I think women have a right. I do. Sometimes I'm ashamed to wear my collar."

She laughed her pleasant, cultivated laughter. "Ashamed to wear your collar? Poor Frank. Afraid people will think badly of you?"

He summoned anger. "Kindly spare me the ad hominem," he said.

"But Frank," she said, it seemed lightly, "there is only ad hominem."

"I'm afraid I'm not theologian enough," he said, "to follow you there."

"Oh," said Mary, "I'm sorry, Father. What I mean in my crude way is that what is expected of you is expected personally. Expected directly. Of *you*, Frank."

He sulked. A childish resentful silence. Then he said, "I can't believe God wants us to persecute these young women the way you people do. I mean you particularly, Mary, with your so-called counselling."

He meant the lectures she gave the unwed mothers who were referred to her by pamphlet. Mary had attended anti-war and anti-apartheid demonstrations with pride. The abortion-clinic demonstrations she undertook as an offered humiliation, standing silently among the transparent cranks and crazies as a penance and a curb to pride. But, surprisingly, when she was done with them in private, over coffee and cake, many pregnant women brought their pregnancies to term.

She watched Father Hooke. He was without gravitas, she thought. The hands, the ineffectual sputter.

"For God's sake," he went on, "look at the neighborhood where you work! Do you really think the world requires a few million more black, alienated, unwanted children?"

She leaned against one of his antique chests and folded her arms. She was tall and elegant, as much an athlete and a beauty at fifty as she had ever been. Camille sat openmouthed.

"How contemptible and dishonest of you to pretend an attack of conscience," she told Hooke quietly. "It's respectability you're after. And to talk about what God wants?" She seemed to be politely repressing a fit of genuine mirth. "When you're afraid to go out and look at his living image? Those things in the car, Frank, that poor little you are afraid to see. That's man, guy, those little forked purple beauties. That's God's image, don't you know that? That's what you're scared of."

He took his glasses off and blinked helplessly.

"Your grief . . ." he began. A weakling, she thought, trying for the upper hand. Trying to appear concerned. In a moment he had lost his nerve. "It's made you cruel. . . . I mean maybe not *cruel*, but . . ."

Mary Urquhart pushed herself upright. "Ah," she said with a flutter of gracious laughter, "the well-worn subject of my grief. Maybe I'm drunk again tonight, eh Father? Who knows?"

Thirteen years before on the lake outside Boston, on the second evening before Christmas, her husband had taken the children skating. First young Charley had wanted to go and Charles had demurred; he'd had a few drinks. Then he had agreed in his shaggy, teasing, slow-spoken way—he was rangy, wry, a Carolina Scot like Mary. It was almost Christmas and the kids were excited and how long would it stay cold enough to skate? Then Payton had demanded to go, and then finally little Emily, because Charles had taught them to snap the whip on ice the day before. And the lake, surrounded by woods, was well lighted and children always skated into the night although there was one end, as it turned out, where the light failed, a lonely bay bordered with dark-blue German pine where even then maybe some junkie had come out from Roxbury or Southie or Lowell or God knew where and destroyed the light for the metal around it. And Emily still had her cold and should not have gone.

But they went and Mary waited late and sometimes, listening to music, having a Wild Turkey, she thought she heard voices sounding strange. She could remember them perfectly now, and the point where she began to doubt, so faintly, that the cries were in fun.

The police said he had clung to the ice for hours, keeping himself alive and the children clinging to him, and many people had heard the calling out but taken it lightly.

She was there when the thing they had been was raised, a blue cluster wrapped in happy seasonal colors, woolly reindeer hats and scarves and mittens, all grasping and limbs intertwined, and it looked, she thought, like a rat king, the tangle of rats trapped together in their own naked tails and flushed from an abandoned hull to float drowned, a raft of solid rat on the swells of the lower Cape Fear River. The dead snarls on their faces, the wild eyes, a paradigm she had seen once as a child she saw again in the model of her family. And near Walden Pond, no less, the west wind slept on the lake, eyes glimmered in the silver dusk, a dusk at

SHOWCASE BY
BRIGITTE LACOMBE

THE REAL THING

One of the qualities we prize in novelists is their ability to convey a sense of place—Edith Wharton's New York, Thomas Hardy's Dorset, William Faulkner's dusty South. What Joan Didion creates in her essays and novels is less reassuring, less fixed, and more truly real: a sense of abiding dislocation. Places are merely sets that can be struck at whim, our selves merely movable props that we have, perhaps falsely, imbued with meaning. Mud slides, oil fires, floods, and tremors figure in Didion's second novel, the 1970 "Play It As It Lays," and the emotional landscape of the characters is likewise unsettled and subject to violence and danger.

The shifting, conditional nature of place is always matched in Didion's work by a mercilessly precise sense of time, of history—of facts. The first words of her new novel, "The Last Thing He Wanted," which will be published in September, are "Some real things have happened lately." This is Didion's first work of fiction since 1984, and that distant, Orwellian year happens to be when the novel is set. A woman of wealth and standing enters the shady world that her father, a small-time arms dealer, inhabited, and disappears into the murderous maw of American geopolitical interests. In the early eighties, Didion made a foray to El Salvador, and since then she has been a student of American involvement in the region. But if Didion, a fifth-generation Californian, had learned everything she knows about politics from observing the ways of Hollywood—the place that eats its own, and anything else in its path—she could not have had better preparation for examining American activities in Central America in the eighties. To people whose idea of engagement with the world is the Internet, this novel is a reminder that there was a time, not so long ago, when, as the narrator says, "we still believed that history merited a second look."

—NANCY FRANKLIN

Joan Didion, New York City, 1996.

morning. She had lost all her pretty ones.

"Because," she said to Father Hooke, "it would appear to me that you are a man—and I know men, I was married to a man—who is a little boy, a little boy-man. A tiny boy-man, afraid to touch the cross or look in God's direction."

He stared at her and swallowed. She smiled as though to reassure him.

"What you should do, Father, is this. Take off the vestments you're afraid to wear. Your mama's dead for whom you became a priest. Become the nice little happy homosexual nonentity you are."

"You are a cruel bitch," Hooke said, pale-faced. "You're a sick and crazy woman."

Camille in her chair began to gasp. Mary bent to attend her.

"Camille? Do you have your inhaler?"

Camille had it. Mary helped her adjust it and waited until her friend's breathing was under control. When she stood up, she saw that Father Hooke was in a bad way.

"You dare," Mary said to him, "you wretched tiny man, to speak of black unwanted children? Why, there is not a suffering black child—God bless them all—not a black child in this unhappy foolish country that I would not exalt and nourish on your goddam watery blood. I would not risk the security of the most doomed, lost, deformed black child for your very life, you worthless pussy!"

Father Hooke had become upset. My Lord, she thought, now I've done it. Now I'll see the creature cry. She looked away.

"You were my only friend," Father Hooke told her when he managed to speak again. "Did you know that?"

She sighed.

"I'm sorry, Father. I suppose I have my ignorant cracker side and God help me I am sick and I am crazy and cruel. Please accept my sincerest apologies. Pray for me."

Hooke would not be consoled. Kind-hearted Camille, holding her inhaler, took a step toward him as though she might help him somehow go on breathing.

"Get out," he said to them. "Get out before I call the police."

"You have to try to forgive me, Charles." Had she called him Charles? How very strange. Poor old Charles would turn in his grave. "Frank, I mean. You have to try and forgive me, Frank. Ask God to forgive me. I'll ask God to forgive you. We all need it, don't we, Father."

"The police!" he cried, his voice rising. "Because those things, those goddam things in your car! Don't you understand? People accuse us of violence!" he shouted. "And you are violence!" Then he more or less dissolved.

She went and put a hand on his shoulder as Camille watched in amazement.

"God forgive us, Frank." But he leaned on the back of his leather easy chair and turned from her, weeping. "Oh Frank, you lamb," she said, "what did your poor mama tell you? Did she say that a world with God was easier than one without Him?"

She gave him a last friendly pat and turned to Camille. "Because that would be mistaken, wouldn't it, Camille?"

"Oh, you're right," Camille hastened to say. The tearful priest had moved her, too. But still she was dry-eyed, staring, Alexandrian. "You're so right, Mary."

WHEN they were on the road again it was plain Camille Innaurato was exhausted.

"So, Mary," she asked. "So where we're going now, honey?"

"Well," Mary said, "as it happens I have another fella up my sleeve." She laughed. "Yes, another of these worthies Holy Mother Church provides for our direction. Another selfless man of the cloth."

"I'll miss Mass tomorrow."

"This is Mass," Mary said.

"Right. O.K."

This is Mass, she thought, this is the sacrifice nor are we out of it. She reached out and gave Camille a friendly touch.

"You don't work tomorrow, do you, love?"

"Naw, I don't," Camille said. "I don't, but . . ."

"I can take you home. I can get this done myself."

"No," said Camille, a little cranky with fatigue. "No way."

"Well, we'll get these children blessed, dear."

The man Mary had up her sleeve was a priest from Central Europe called Monsignor Danilo. It was after ten when Mary telephoned him from a service station, but he hurriedly agreed to do what she required. He was smooth and obsequious and seemed always ready to accommodate her.

His parish, St. Macarius, was in an old port town on Newark Bay, and to get there they had to retrace their drive through the country and then travel south past several exits of the Garden State.

It took them nearly an hour, even with the sparse traffic. The church and rectory were in a waterfront neighborhood of refineries and wooden tenements little better than the ones around Temple Street. The Monsignor had arranged to meet them in the church.

The church interior was an Irish-Jansenist nightmare of tarnished marble, white-steepled tabernacles, and cream columns. Under a different patron, it had served the Irish dockers of a hundred years before. Its dimensions were too mean and narrow to support the mass of decoration, and Father Danilo's bunch had piled the space with their icons, vaguely Byzantine Slavic saints and Desert Fathers and celebrity saints in their Slavic aspect.

Candles were flickering as the two women entered. The place smelled of wax, stale wine, and the incense of past ceremony. Mary carried the babies under their purple cloth.

Monsignor Danilo waited before the altar, at the end of the main aisle. He wore his empurpled cassock with surplice and a silk stole. His spectacles reflected the candlelight.

Beside him stood a tall, very thin, expressionless young man in cassock and surplice. The young man, in need of a shave, held a paten on which cruets of holy water and chrism and a slice of lemon had been set.

Monsignor Danilo smiled his lupine smile, and when Mary had set the babies down before the altar he took her hand in his. In the past he had sometimes kissed it; tonight he pressed it to his breast. The intrusion of his flabby body on her senses filled Mary with loathing. He paid no attention to Camille Innaurato and he did not introduce the server.

"Ah," he said, bending to lift the curtain under which the creatures lay, "the little children, no?"

She watched him regard the things with cool compassion, as though he were moved by their beauty, their vestigial humanity, the likeness of their Creator. But perhaps, she thought, he had seen ghastly sights before and smiled on them. Innocent as he might be, she thought, he was the reeking model of every Jew-baiting, clerical Fascist murderer who ever took orders east of the Danube. His merry countenance was crass hypocrisy. His hands were huge, thick-knuckled, the hands of a brute, as his face was the face of a smiling Cain.

"So beautiful," he said. Then he said something in his native language to the slovenly young man, who looked at Mary with a smirk and shrugged and smiled in a vulgar manner. She did not let her gaze linger.

Afterward, she would have to hear about Danilo's mother and her trip to behold the apparition of the Virgin in some Bessarabian or Balkan hamlet and the singular misfortunes, historically unique, of Danilo's native land. And she would have to give him at least seventy-five dollars or there would be squeals and a disappointed face. And now something extra for the young man, no doubt an illegal alien, jumped-ship and saving his pennies.

Camille Innaurato breathed through her inhaler. Father Danilo took a cruet from the paten and with his thick fingers sprinkled a blessing on the lifeless things. Then they all faced the altar and the Eastern crucifix that hung suspended there. They prayed together in the Latin each knew:

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
Miserere nobis.

Finally, she was alone with the ancient Thing before whose will she still stood amazed, whose shadow and line and light they all were: the bad priest and the questionable young man and Camille Innaurato, she herself and the unleavened flesh fouling the floor. Adoring, defiant, in the crack-house flicker of that hideous, consecrated half-darkness, she offered It Its due, by old command.

Lamb of God, who takest away the
sins of the world,
Have mercy on us. ◆

LETTERS • GORE VIDAL

DINNER WITH THE PRINCESS

Gore Vidal has carried on an epistolary conversation with Louis Auchincloss for more than forty years.

Rome
1965

Dear Louis:

TULLIO PERICOLI

The Princess [Margaret] arrived with husband and turned out to be quite splendid, droll, with at least three manners, all beguiling. One: gracious interested lady visiting the troops. Two: bitchy young matron with a cold eye for contemporaries. Three: a splendid Edith Evans delivery (a Q. Victoria with slow measured accents): "We are not partial to heights," she intoned gravely over a chicken wing, "not partial at all." That took care of Switzerland. Well primed, she had read "Julian" she *said;* & after a brutal quiz on my part, she proved it by passing the course. "I even got Gibbon out of the library. Didn't do so well with him. But the marginal notes of some old dean were fascinating. Every time there was an attack upon the Christians he would write, 'Not true!' or 'Too vile!' " What else? The Windsors: "I don't know my uncle [Edward, who abdicated in 1936 to marry the divorced Mrs. Simpson]. Isn't that odd?" I told her I had seen the film of his life in Paris with him and the Duchess. "They'll do *anything* for money!" She said darkly, "That's all they think of." I blamed the Duchess; we both decided her uncle was all right but ga-ga. I told her Jackie's version of the dinner the Queen gave for the J.F.K.s. The Q. had not wanted to invite Lee [Radziwill, Jackie Kennedy's sister]. Jackie said, then let's forget the whole thing, it's a private visit anyway. The Q. gave in. Meanwhile the Kennedys had been asked if there was anyone in England they might like to meet. Jack said the Dss. of Kent. Jackie said Margaret. Neither was invited. The Q.'s revenge. M. nodded thoughtfully, "That could've been true—I know I rang my sister, furious at not being invited, and she said, 'Ah, I thought since you were pregnant you wouldn't want to bother!' Too maddening!" When Jackie said she wondered how the Queen was able to endure such long tours as the Canadian one, the Q. said, "One learns how to save oneself." "A very sensible answer," said the Princess. "She *does* learn how. After all, if you're brought up knowing that that's what you've got to do for the rest of your life you just do it as best you can. Of course," she said, scouting the buffet table for a bit of cheese, "it must be awful for someone not used to it who gets involved in that sort of thing, you know . . . *briefly,*" she added with a dazzling smile. They are renowned cadgers. She admitted as much when I said how much I liked the Romans because they are lovely to be with but, like cats, when one was gone that was that—"People accuse me of that & I suppose it's true. But there isn't time. How many people do you write letters to? *Regularly?*" I said very few. Only to Louis at the moment & that is for posterity! "You see," she said triumphantly, "I write *none!*" ◆

FICTION

THE TIMES SQUARE STORY

It's not a movie—it's a life.

BY GEOFFREY O'BRIEN

a name you got a picture, first thing I learned in this business, you got a name or a phrase for what you're putting together you can turn it into anything, backing, bookings, generate word of mouth, pre-sell whole chains of screens, O.K.?

so this picture we're talking about is "The Times Square Story," as in "The Tijuana Story" and "The Las Vegas Story" and "The Phenix City Story," any way you want it, it's always the same story anyway, racket guys running slots and dope and B-girls until some crusading journalist busts everything wide open,

but this one is different, this is New York, show biz, crossroads of the world, entertainment capital, everything open after midnight, not just a bunch of dumb gangsters pushing people around, this one has jazz, exotic night life, hipster talk, black tights, psychoanalysis,

at any rate, the way I see the scenario a kid arrives in the city for the first time, gets off the bus with a cheap rattan suitcase, and as he comes around the corner from Port Authority he sees Times Square all lit up, and he's weak in the knees, in tears almost, a sudden uncontrollable response, it's like church,

this is where reality begins, and the kid's ripe for it, he's a blank slate, Norman Rockwell material, his folks back home buy *Grit* from a goofy-looking boy on a bicycle who's saving up to buy a high-quality fishing rod, there's a boxy sofa and a gigantic cabinet-style television set, where they watch "What's My Line?" and "Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour,"

so far this has all been the pre-credit sequence but now the credits start rolling, on the soundtrack you've got a blaring big-band sound, like the Shorty Rogers arrangement of "Infinity Promenade," and the names jump out staccato, and we hit them with every kind of noise and spectacle, neon, high heels, lipstick, taxicabs, the cigarette blowing smoke through the billboard, the electronic wraparound headlines, "PLANE CRASH," "WORLD SERIES," "RIOTS," the green pulsating letters flashing "Fascination Fascination" above the arcade, and the music is all the time building, the drumroll weighs a ton, and when the payoff comes the trumpets are screaming louder than all the night-club bands in the world,

and the images don't stop, card sharks and go-go dancers, black-and-white glossies of Liana the Leopard Woman outside a peepshow on Eighth Avenue, aging bodybuilders who bend railroad spikes with their bare hands in a basement-level flea circus, fight promoters with washed-up punch-drunk boxers, record agents who specialize in stealing material off high-school singing groups, a dazed sailor stumbling into the sunlight flanked by pickpockets and winos, a street-corner preacher passing out pictures of hellfire,

hot-dog smoke coming out of Nedick's, fruit juice bubbling in a blender, and under the subway entrance a hole-in-the-wall kiosk where they sell the 45s you can't find anywhere else, "Earth Angel," by the Penguins, or the Flamingos doing "I Only Have Eyes for You," the falsetto cutting through the train roar,

and a warehouse of decaying back issues of *Saga* and *Nugget* and *True Detective*, and naturist magazines full of naked people playing volleyball, and comic books about lady pirates who wear tight vinyl corsets and whip each other on the deck of the frigate when they aren't being suspended from the yardarm,

and stacks of novels printed in Colorado on cheap yellow paper and giving out an odor of some unspeakable glue, with hand-painted covers of sailors and nurses, schoolgirls and bald-headed lechers, gargoyles with grotesque breasts and muscles and eyes popping out of the heads with lust,

and as a backdrop you have the marquees on the movie theatres on the Deuce, those beautiful word-pictures changing weekly, like an index of what's going on in the world, giant words jutting out from the Lyric and the Victory and the Times Square itself, only instead of "Summit Conference" and "Arms Treaty" it's "Vampires from Space" and "Love-Slaves of the Amazon,"

anyway, getting back to our picture, round about here, as we're sitting inside this kid as he sits inside a fleapit movie palace, and we're seeing the movie he's watching through his eyes, right here we cut to the movie within the movie, two men having a knife fight on the deck of a fishing boat somewhere off the Gulf Coast, and when you hear the director say "cut" the camera moves back and you see the wires and the lights, and you're somewhere on the Jersey shore, and a film crew is making a movie about a bunch of guys looking for a lost treasure somewhere off the Gulf Coast, and the working title is "Fury of Macumba,"

it all has to do with a gang of soldier-of-fortune types who stole a treasure map off a drunk in a bar and are now cruising around the Caribbean looking for a lost sandbar where Blackbeard the Pirate stashed a load of Spanish doubloons, the plot kicks into gear when they run across a beautiful girl abandoned in a derelict lifeboat, and they take her on board and immediately the atmosphere gets thick with lust and resentment, she's at their mercy and it's looking bad for her until

FILIP PAGOWSKI

she turns to the young engineer who's piloting the boat, the only one with any integrity, and the upshot is a no-holds-barred knife fight between him and one of the mercenaries,

except the actor playing the engineer is so besotted with shot after shot of Seagram's 7 Crown that the film crew can hardly drag him out of the harborside bars and sober him up enough to read his pathetically simple dialogue, last-minute rewrites, drastically cut, because by eleven in the morning he is so totally in the bag he can't articulate anything more complex than "I guess I will" or "This has gone far enough" or "That's what you think," not to mention he isn't quite so young as this engineer is supposed to be in the script, more like the guy's alcoholic uncle they don't like to mention at the family reunion,

and this was someone who started with the majors, but it was during the war when all the big names like Gable and Tyrone Power had enlisted, so he was one of the replacement stars, the war ends and he's down the tube, he knows he's in trouble when it's his third Western in a row and they're making do with props and costumes left over from a pirate movie on the next lot, because the guy is now so far out of favor he can't even get arrested, so it isn't surprising he winds up shooting a treasure story, the joke is the guy actually thinks it's good,

and the producer's an old carny hand, seventy years old, chomping on a cigar in his trailer, by his lights this picture is a big deal, he's got a Hollywood star, a socko title, plus on-location action scenes filmed off the coast of Asbury Park, only trouble is the script needs work, he got a deal on the writer, a guy so inherently unreliable he could barely find work writing continuity for "Aquaman" comics or knocking out true-confession stories like "My Husband Doesn't Know I'm a Tramp" or "My Boyfriend Sold Me to the Highest Bidder," he wrote the movie in three days holed up in a Times Square hotel room with a couple of cases of Knickerbocker and a fistful of reefers, not knowing that was all the payment he was ever going to get, the old switcheroo, sorry we can't use this, not up to our usual standards, then they change the names of the characters and shoot it just like he wrote it, more or less, except for cutting out the endless speeches about the pitiful conditions of migrant workers, strictly "Red Channels" stuff left over from when he was trying to become famous as a proletarian novelist,

and for director they've got a Germanic genius, who worked with Jannings and Murnau in the old days at U.F.A., knows all about lighting and art direction, but got in trouble at the studios because of a morals charge that had to be covered up, potential felony, so now the majors won't touch him and he's lucky to be working, he's the kind of pain-in-the-ass guy who fled from the Nazis because he was mad that they stole his act, but he knows his stuff, and can turn a feature around so fast it makes your head spin, twenty setups a day and the sonofabitch actually takes pride in his work,

and for the woman they've got Miss Columbus Ohio 1952, unutterably gorgeous but makes everybody crazy with her belief in astrological influences, reads paperbacks about aliens crash-landing in the desert, it's a government conspiracy, everybody who finds out about it gets programmed to say something different and they don't allow cameras anywhere near the crash site, it's top secret like the atom bomb, she drives them nuts with this stuff, they've heard the same story a hundred times,

you can imagine the mood on the set with the producer screaming into the phone trying to buy enough short ends of film to cover the next day's shooting, and the director sitting in morbid silence for hours to show his disdain for the barbarians he's forced to work with and then breaking into a rant in a mixture of German and English, while the leading man struggles to keep from slumping over,

I know, you're asking what about the kid, he's a plot twist in the middle of the story, he gets a job as a messenger, carrying film cans with the dailies from the lab to the screening rooms, and it's a glamorous thing, he gets to see rushes of lowdown, dollar-ninety-eight, tits-and-ass epics, until one night coming back from work he sees some gang guys knocking somebody off in an alley off Ninth Avenue, a professional hit, nothing to do with him but they get a look at his face and he knows he's in trouble, doesn't have change of a match, nobody he can turn to, so he tells a guy at the film lab where he works that he needs to get out of town, and the lab guy has a friend in the business who's making a movie down on the Jersey shore and he needs help, a gofer- or handyman-type of position, so off he goes and, what do you know, the movie guy is our producer,

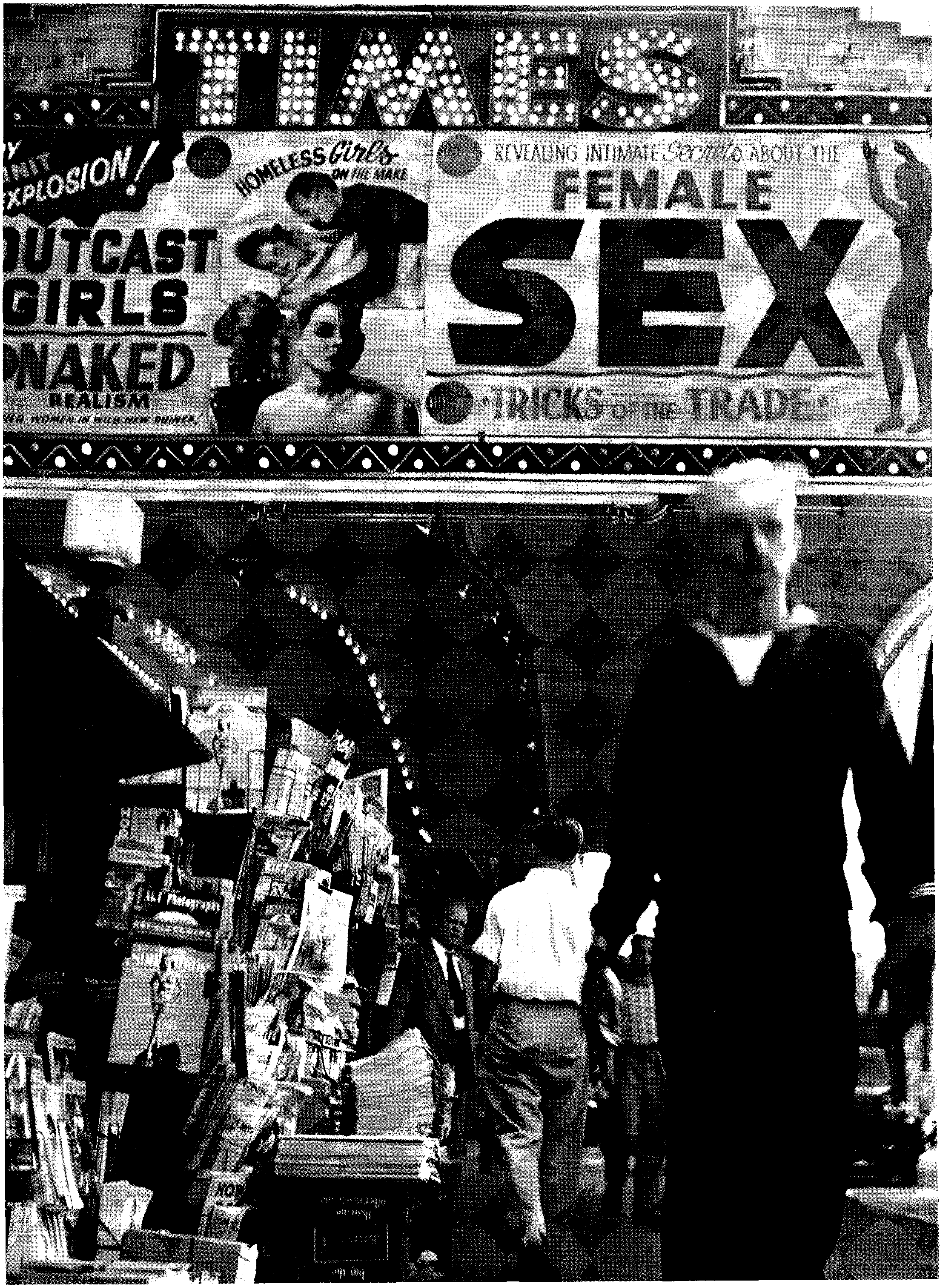
who is also in trouble because the distrib is unhappy with the rushes, this treasure-hunt stuff is way out of date, it's now spies in sports cars, chicks in miniskirts, the audience is more sophisticated, on top of that the actor is feeling disenchanted, they said they were going to find him work in Italy but it turned out to be Mexico, and then it wasn't even Mexico but a godforsaken motel on the edge of New Jersey filming this cockamamie story about an ancient Seminole curse that unleashes a monster that goes after the gang of treasure hunters,

don't worry, they tell him, it's only temporary, but it's no use, he's hitting the bottle, this is a crisis because even though he's washed up they need his name on the marquee, and it turns out that Miss Columbus knows just the person to give the actor a new lease on life, a doctor with a revolutionary new method, a combination of electricity and injections and some kind of sex therapy, very modern,

and at this juncture the kid becomes key, a catalyst, drawn into this human vortex, and his innocence is invigorating for all these slightly degenerate people, and *he's* fascinated, too, because he's learning about life from these fractured characters who love to talk to him because in his youthfulness they see their own lost hopes and dreams,

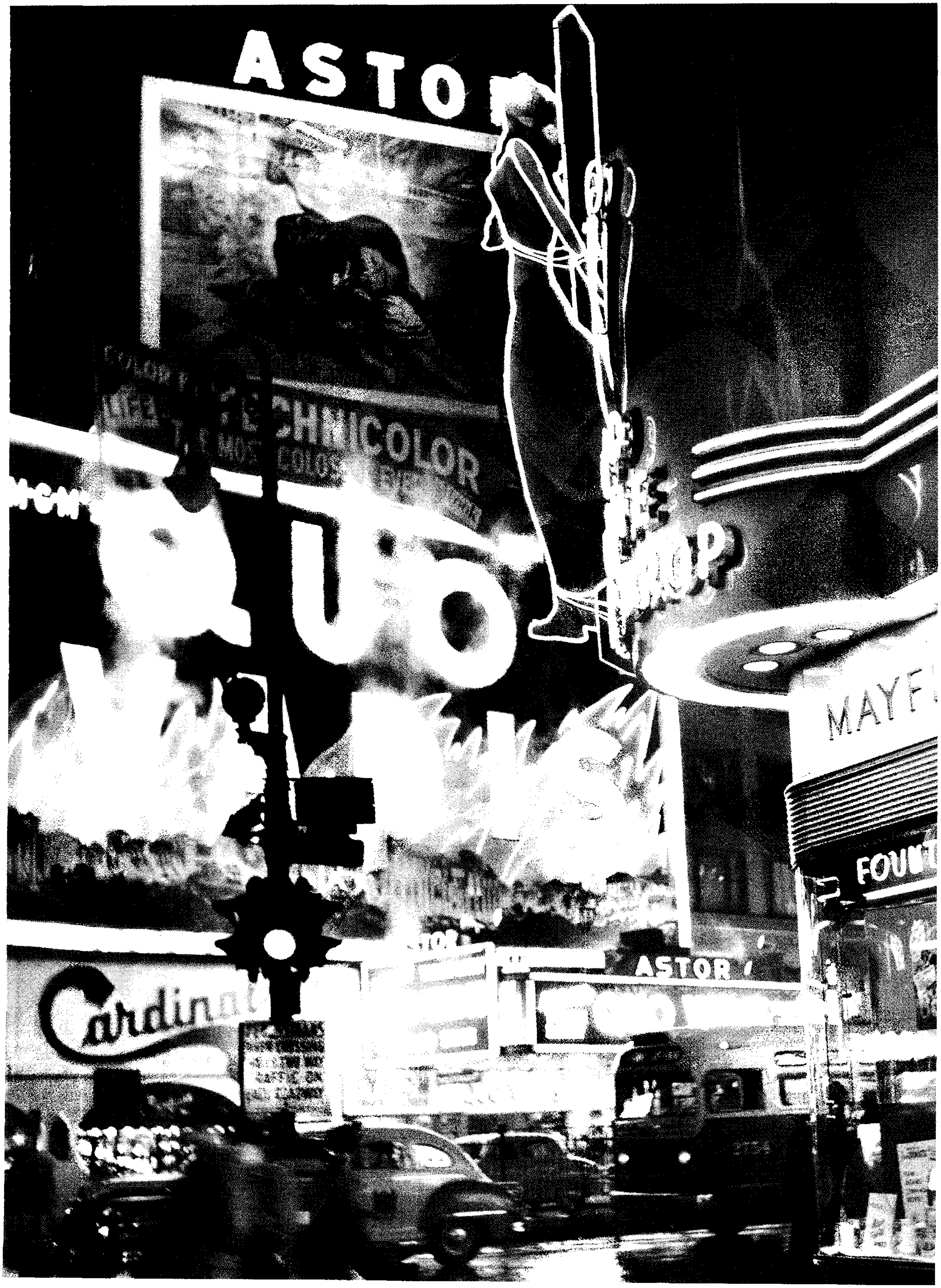
meanwhile the treasure picture has wrapped even though the last reel got garbled, the effects for the monster didn't work out so they had to wind it up with a big fistfight instead, the mercenary falls in the swamp and the gators get him, not much of an ending but they've had their share of disappointments before, so now it's back to the city, the kid tagging along,

and it's straight into the fast life, jazz clubs, Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker and Art Pepper, and Teddy Edwards blowing five hundred choruses of "Sunset Eyes," not to mention strip joints, pot parties, mambo clubs, dice games, long days at the track


TIMES
EXPLOSION!
OUTCAST
GIRLS
NAKED
REALISM
WOMEN IN WILD NEW GUINEA!
HOMELESS Girls
ON THE MAKE
REVEALING INTIMATE Secrets ABOUT THE
FEMALE
SEX
TRICKS OF THE TRADE

COURTESY OF KEITH DE LELIS

"Neon, high heels, lipstick, taxicabs, the cigarette blowing smoke through the billboard, the electronic wraparound headlines, 'PLANE CRAS


ASTOR
TECHNICOLOR
SHOP
MAYF
FOUN
Cardinal
ASTOR

ORLD SERIES,' 'RIOTS,' *the green pulsating letters flashing* 'FASCINATION FASCINATION' *above the arcade." Photographs by Rolf Tietgens.*

"Job! I hear you've got a book out!"

polished off at a restaurant in Chinatown, constantly hustling money for the next picture, if one idea doesn't fly there's always plenty more, New York is frantic with ideas, they trade them off like those jazz choruses,

the producer's on fire now, the indie scene is exploding and he wants in, there's no limits, how about a guy who invents a ray that turns people invisible, saves money on actors, no idea is too far out for today's audiences, how about teen-age bank robbers on dope, how about a Martian superbrain who operates from inside a cave, how about hot-rodders duking it out at a roadhouse, and a bellboy who spies on women in a hotel, and a modelling agency that turns out to be a front for a white-slave racket,

but somehow it's still not enough, the ground rules are changing and the distribution guy's losing confidence in the producer's ability, and the producer's saying who the fuck do you think I am? do I look like William Wyler?

and the money is running out, the treasure picture is a commercial disaster, not enough action, not enough anything, those long afternoons at Aqueduct haven't helped the financial outlook, either, the producer is desperate, the director is sullen, and the actor thinks he ought to be doing cigarette commercials or educational movies to warn high-school students against the dangers of fast driving, something with a future, instead of waiting around for a movie that may never happen,

and the kid has forgotten all about those racketeers in the alley because by now he's hopelessly in love with Miss Columbus, who reminds him of a home-town girl he used to admire from afar and who is so, so sexually enticing in a way he never experienced before, and being in movies for him means that maybe he's in with a chance, but he's doomed to disappointment, toward him her feeling is strictly protective, like a younger brother, and why would such a sweet kid want to get involved in the business in the first place?

but maybe they can play another angle, after all it's now the golden age of moviemaking, excuse me I meant cinema, every twelve-year-old in America suddenly wants to wear dark glasses and make a French movie, amateurs are winning prizes for pictures where they can't keep the focus from one frame to the next, the producer figures he needs an underground project, something serious, like one of these New Wave movies with the handheld camera, it's O.K. to look cheap now, it's authentic,

so the producer in desperation calls up the scriptwriter, the same guy who got stiffed on the treasure movie, and tells him look I can't pay you now but I've got a deal you're going to like, a percentage of my next picture, this is the shot you've been waiting for, you can write your own ticket, the scriptwriter isn't too happy about the money part but the producer knows the guy's weakness, he's into the dope, not habitual but it's a soft spot,

and this is where the doctor comes in again, his cure for the actor has been a tremendous success, the guy is like a new man, his agent is returning his calls, the young girls are giving him the eye, but deep down he's fragile, he's still coming in for shots, and the doctor is milking this for everything it's worth because even though he's a psychiatric genius what he really wants is to get into the business,

and he's talking trade-offs, how about if he invests some of the money he's raking in from his sex therapy in the next picture, in exchange for co-producer billing, a piece of the action, and all this is fine by the producer because the doctor can help him, too, in this case by plying the scriptwriter with selected pharmaceuticals from his medicine cabinet, just enough to give him energy to complete the screenplay, a taboo-breaking nudie vehicle that will make their fortune, and it's working, he's into it, he's churning out the pages and when the producer sees them he's ecstatic, this time it's the real goods,

the script is "Suburban Swingers," torn from the pages of real life, there are such people, these housewives who start whoring on the side because their husbands don't give them enough bread to pay for the beauty parlor and the clothes and so forth and so on, they're picking up guys between nine and five in the bar across the street from the train station, the irony being that these guys are just like their husbands,

the payoff is when one of the wives picks up her own husband, it's so dark in the bar he doesn't see her face until they're in bed, big emotional climax, she threatens suicide, they decide to change the way they live except they're still stuck in the goddam suburbs, this stuff is real, we're holding up the mirror, the dawn comes they're staring at each other across the kitchen table saying nothing, very modern, very bitter,

so the producer's got his script, he's got the backing, he's ready to roll, except "Suburban Swingers" turns out to be a movie with a curse, like for starters the director, who's dying but didn't tell anybody, it's his last chance to realize the vision he's been trying to express in all the misbegotten features of his career, he calls it "the shimmer of transfiguration," *Verwandlungsschimmer*, it tortures him that he can't capture it on film and sometimes he thinks if he ever does he will die, that will be it, lights out, kaput,

and the kid has the lead, he's the young husband who's shattered to find out his wife's a hooker, this could be his breakthrough, and if he becomes a star maybe Miss Columbus will marry him, only Miss Columbus has eyes for someone else, all along it's been the actor, who feels exactly the same, after all she was the one who steered him to the doctor and saved him from himself, now they both want out of the business, in between takes they're talking about raising chickens, starting a family, exactly the kind of life the kid left behind,

for the producer it's simply his last chance to keep a toehold in the business, he's staked everything on a picture that in the end will be so miserable and depressing it's practically unexploitable anywhere, even though the screenwriter to the end of his days will be telling people "I wrote a masterpiece and they butchered it, they took a piece of truthtelling and hacked it into little pieces,"

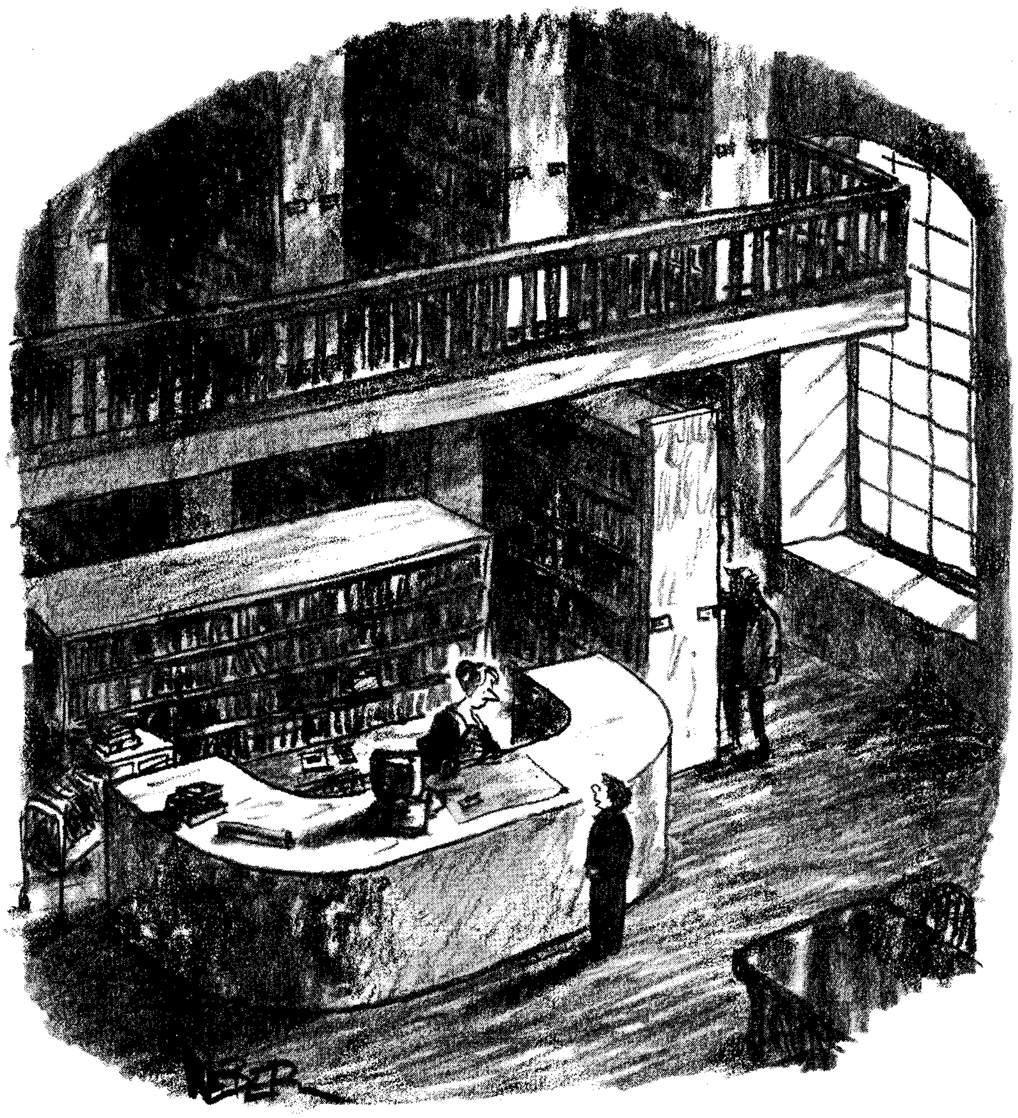
the director doesn't live to see any of that, just like he predicted he dies on the last day of shooting, they assemble the rough cut from his notes, and none of them will ever understand that he died in ecstasy, believing he'd found perfection and it was so perfect it didn't look like anything at all, nobody but him would ever see how all the elements fit together and it didn't matter, it was perfect anyway,

so the producer doesn't get rich, and the kid doesn't become a star and he doesn't get the girl, either, when they all get drunk at the party after the opening the kid finally tells Miss Columbus he's desperately in love with her, he wants to run away with her now that the picture's finished, so she breaks the bad news to him gently, he's numb for a while, and then he realizes that a whole segment of his life is shutting down,

everybody is disappearing, the producer is in Florida looking into a three-picture deal with a land developer who bought into a chain of drive-ins, the film crew is scattered to the winds,

and the actor and Miss Columbus are off to the Jersey shore for a week in motel heaven, skin and sun and even a little booze to wash it down, he can handle it now, this is how it's going to be from now on, back in touch with reality, lying in the room listening to Symphony Sid spin "Willow Weep for Me" from the "Clifford Brown with Strings" album, last I heard he was doing voice-overs for a chain of shoe stores in Cincinnati,

and finally there's the kid back in the middle of Times Square, the lights flashing, right where we came in at the beginning of the picture, he can't believe it's over, they're all gone, the scene is blown, on the sidewalk he feels the first blast of autumn and he's looking straight into the camera as if to say where do I go from here, so what we do, we freeze the frame, one last mournful wail on the sax, the perfect ending, he's alone, he's in Times Square, the frame freezes, he's there, we're with him, alone in Times Square forever ♦



"I'd like to see everything you have on girls."

MORALITY TALE

ADULTERY

Why settle for a marriage that is less than perfect?

BY TIM PARKS

A COUPLE of years ago, I attended a lecture on a somewhat abstruse theme: "Marriage Bedroom Tapestries in the Works of Shakespeare." It's not the kind of thing I would generally move heaven and earth to get to, but I was stuck in a conference at Lake Como, way out of town, it was raining heavily, and there was nothing else to do. As it turned out, I was spellbound. The speaker, a fine-looking woman in her fifties, used slides and video to illustrate the ambiguities of a series of images woven onto the upholstered bedsteads of the Elizabethan aristocracy. Particularly fascinating were scenes of domestic bliss undermined by allusions to more disturbing emotions: serpents and harpies warning rapturous newlyweds of obscure calamities to come. The speaker explained how Shakespeare had drawn on this material in his plays, but what she ended up giving us was a history of marriage, from its dynastic origins, when family was everything and sentiments were relegated to extramarital adventures, through the crisis sparked off by the tradition of courtly love, when husbands and wives began to leave their partners to follow their lovers, to the novel idea that marriage be founded on love rather than on family. This, the speaker claimed, was the subject of three plays she had selected for consideration, the underlying theme of the allegories in the bedroom tapestries: the huge gamble of placing love at the heart of marriage, the sad discovery, fearfully embodied in Othello, that love is even more fragile than dynasty. All it takes is an unexplained handkerchief, a jealous temperament, and, as Shakespeare put it, "Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!"

After the lecture, chatting with two elderly professors, I couldn't help praising the woman's marvellous dispatch, the energy and passion and relevance of her analysis of marriage. "A brilliant lecture," I insisted.

"No mystery about that," remarked one of the two. His smile was at once sad and wry. "Her husband just left her for a twenty-five-year-old."

LOVE and dynasty, passion and family. It was around this time that Alistair's story got into full swing. (Names, of course, and some details of the story have been changed.) I was his confidant. We played squash together twice a week, and over beers afterward he would tell me all about it. As he spoke, his voice was full of laughter and his face burned with excitement. "You've blown your marriage," I warned him. He laughed out loud and used sports terminology: playing away, scoring in extra time, next week's game plan. "The logistics can be so complicated," he said, chuckling. He even giggled. And you could see what an enormous sense of release he felt in this first affair after eight years of marriage. Alistair was a very sober, solid, reliable man, but now the great dam of vows and virtue was crumbling beneath a tidal wave of Dionysiac excitement.

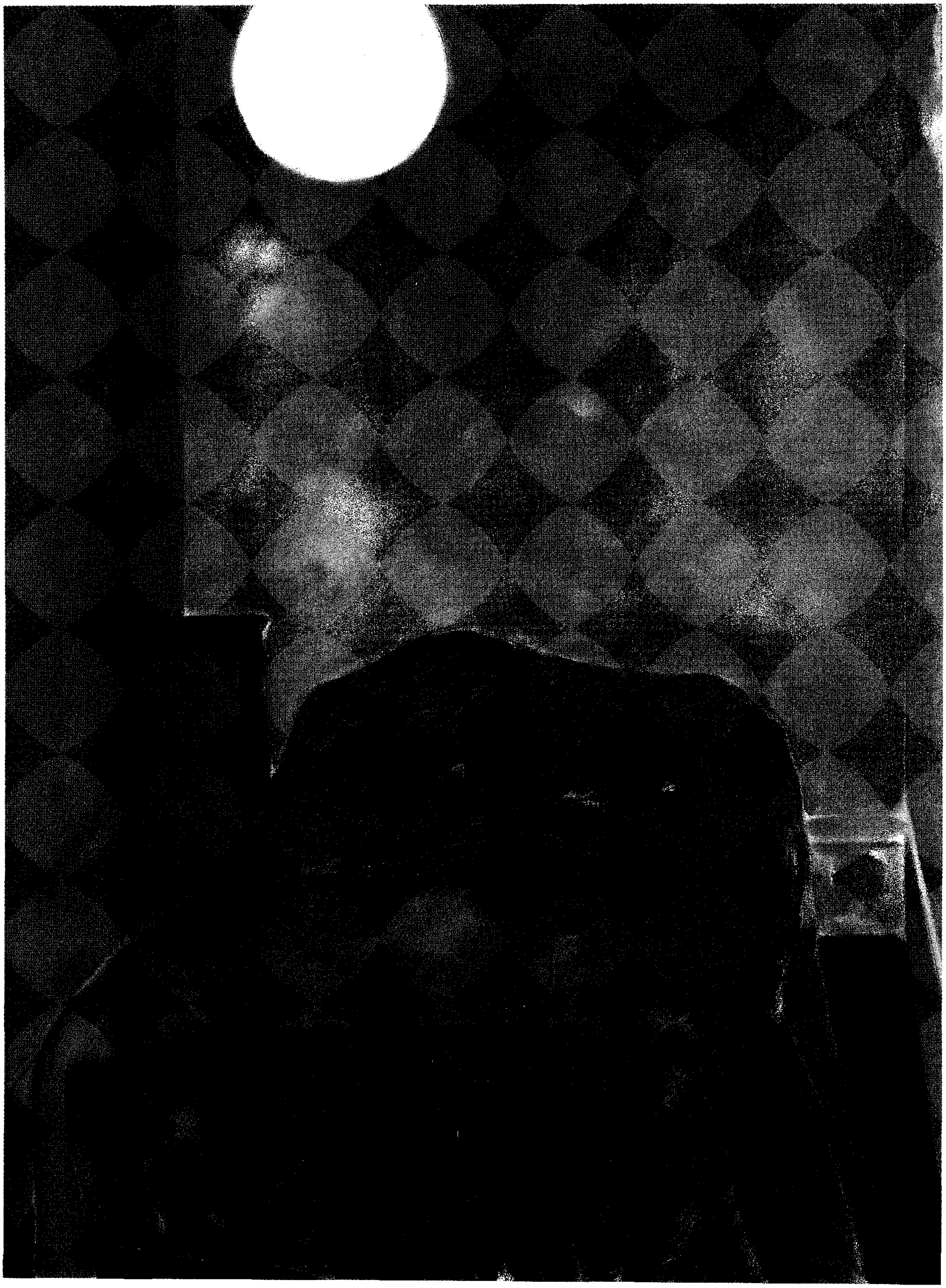
We worked together at the university, and in the corridor I showed him a passage from a book I was translating, Roberto Calasso's "The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony." "Dionysus is not a useful god who helps weave or knot things together, but a god who loosens and unties," it said. "The weavers are his enemies. Yet there comes a moment when the weavers will abandon their looms to dash off after him into the mountains. Dionysus is the river we hear flowing by in the distance, an incessant booming from far away; then one day it rises and floods everything, as if the normal above-water state of things, the sober delimitation of our existence, were but a brief parenthesis overwhelmed in an instant."

"You're possessed," I told him. Alistair nodded and laughed. He had been a weaver for so long. He had woven together family-house-career-car. But the following evening, after squash again, he described how in that family car his mistress had pulled up her skirt—they were on the turnpike from Verona to Venice—and started masturbating, then rubbed her scented hand across his face, pushed her fingers in his mouth. Since we live in Italy, and have both lived here a long time, he occasionally broke into Italian. "*Evviva le puttanelle!*" he said, and laughed again. "Long live the little whores!" He was in love with her. For those of us still safely married, it's hard not to feel a mixture of trepidation and envy on seeing a friend in this state. Clearly it is very exciting when you start destroying everything.

Alistair referred to his wife as "the Queen of Unreason" or "She Who Must Be Obeyed." She was still a weaver. They had two young children. In the way that feminism has changed everything and nothing, she was in charge at home; she felt primarily responsible for the children. Men, of course, now help in the home, and Alistair, being a reasonable and generous man, helped a great deal—more than most. But he was not in charge. His wife's conscientiousness and maternal anxiety, heightened no doubt by her decision to stay at work despite the kids, must have frequently looked like bossiness to him. Their arguments were trivial—whose turn it was to do this or that. He felt himself the butt of her imperatives, his behavior constantly under observation. Making love is difficult in these circumstances, though doubtless these two people loved each other. Or perhaps with everything now achieved it was time for something else to happen. All of us have so much potential that will never be realized within the confines necessary to weave anything together. Job and marriage are our two greatest prisons. When Alistair asked his wife what was wrong and how could he understand if she didn't tell him, she said if only he spared her a moment's attention he would understand without being told. Every intimacy is a potential hell. Alistair referred to sex with his wife as "duty-fucking."

The affair began. Chiara was a young

COURTESY MARLBOROUGH FINE ART, LONDON



"You must never put the word 'only' in front of 'sex.' Or not the kind we have. It's an absolute." Painting by R.B. Kitaj.

divorcée, thirty-three, with a ten-year-old daughter and an excellent job in education administration which took her to the same conferences Alistair attended. Rather than a decision, infidelity was a question of opportunity coinciding with impulse—no, with a day when Alistair felt he deserved this escape. Sex was new again. They made love in Rome, Naples, Geneva, Marseilles. They made love in cars, trains, boats. They made love in every possible way. Anal sex, water sports, mutual masturbation: I had to listen to it all. The complicated logistics of their encounters seemed to be at least half the thrill—the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones, the dangers of credit cards. They adored each other's bodies, inside and out. Alistair was in love with Chiara. Wasn't she beautiful? After lovemaking they had such intelligent conversations: philosophy, psychology, politics, their lives. They gave books to each other. They swapped stories. They experienced the delirium of all that information flowing back and forth—your own life retold, another life discovered. There is always something to talk about when one is falling in love. As so often there is not in the long-haul mechanics of marriage.

But how could Alistair leave his children? He loved his children. His wife, though, was becoming more and more difficult. He would interrupt his long descriptions of frantic sex to tell me self-justifying stories of his wife's unreasonableness. Why did she always object to the way he did even the most trivial things: the way he hung a picture; the way he left his toothbrush—get this—turned outward from the tooth glass, so it dripped on the floor, instead of inward, so it didn't? "Can you imagine!" he protested. Not to mention the fact that she never gave him blow jobs. But Alistair admitted that he couldn't be sure anymore whether his arguments with his wife were purely between them or had to do with his mistress. Perhaps he was deliberately stirring up these petty conflicts in order to justify his eventual departure. Perhaps they weren't arguing about a toothbrush at all. Out of nostalgia, or guilt, or just in order to see what it felt like, Alistair would try to be romantic with his wife. He would bring flowers. When the children were safely asleep, he would persuade her to make love. And immediately he would realize he didn't really want to make love to her. He felt no vigor, no zest. He wanted to be with his mistress. "I told her I'd heard the baby coughing," he said, and he laughed, sadly.

Passion, family. Was it time for Alistair to leave home? I thought so. But he said that when he and his wife sat together of an evening, playing with the children or catching a movie on TV, they were perfectly happy. Not to mention the economics involved. And perhaps the thing he had with Chiara couldn't be turned into long-term cohabitation. He lived in the ecstasy of the choice unmade, the divided mind. Convinced that he was trying to come to a decision, he relentlessly applied the logic that was so effective in his research, as if this were a technical problem that it must be possible to solve somehow. It's the Cartesian legacy that has filled the stores with self-help books: life is a problem to solve if only you know the formula. I was equally glib. "You've just got to work out which means most to you," I told him. "Perhaps it's only sex with Chiara."

"You must never put the word 'only' in front of 'sex,' " he objected. "Or not the kind we have. It's an absolute."

"So you're only staying at home for the children," I tried. "You should leave."

But then he said that you couldn't put the word "only" in front of "children," either. Passion and children were both absolutes. You couldn't weigh them against each other. In the end, Alistair managed to prolong a state of doubt and potential, of anything-can-happen precariousness, for nigh on eighteen months. Later, he would appreciate that this had been the happiest time of his life.

But now Chiara was cooling. There were limits to this feverish equilibrium. Finally, Alistair and his wife decided to take separate holidays. The months of July and August would be spent apart. "Are you sure you mean it?" I asked him. He had phoned me to say he'd told Chiara he was leaving his wife. "After all, that's not strictly true," I said. "You only decided on separate holidays." He said he thought he meant it. Anyway, the point was that *he felt he had to make something happen.* The expression stayed in my mind. It gnawed—because it was unusually honest. As I think back on the many people I know who have divorced, or separated, or left each other and got back together, then left each other again and got back together again, or divorced and married someone else and divorced again and married someone else again, it occurs to me that while most of them talk earnestly of their search for happiness, their dream of the perfect relationship, what really drives them is a thirst for intensity, for some kind of destiny, which often means disaster. It's the same endearing perversity that made Paradise so tedious that, one way or another, that apple just had to be eaten. Man was never innocent. Marriage was never safe. "I have to make something happen," Alistair said. In this finely managed, career-structured world that we've worked so hard to build, with its automatic gates and hissing lawns, its comprehensive insurance policies, divorce remains one of the few catastrophes we can reasonably expect to provoke. It calls to us like a siren, offering a truly spectacular shipwreck. Oh, to do some really serious damage at last!

But Chiara said no. Chiara didn't want to live with Alistair. She didn't want to risk the happy routine she had built up with her daughter after her divorce. She didn't want to risk love again. She didn't want to be responsible, she said, for ruining Alistair's marriage. They must stop seeing each other completely.

Alistair collapsed. The gods abandoned him. Intoxication was gone, and he couldn't live without it. He couldn't live without joy, he said. His smoking shot up to sixty a day. He drank heavily. His wife, alarmed, became excessively kind. This infuriated Alistair. He could barely speak to her. He could barely speak to his children. He could barely *see* his children. Unable to sleep at night, he dozed all day. His work went to pieces. He tortured himself with the thought that if he had asked sooner Chiara would have said yes. His procrastination had destroyed her passion. He should have trusted his instincts. Finally, I managed to persuade him to see an analyst.

As I said, we live in Italy. It's a country where people divorce significantly less than in the U.S.A. but probably have more affairs. It's a country which perhaps never fully believed that romance should be the lifeblood of marriage, or not after the children have arrived; a country where a friend of mine told me that at his wedding his grandmother advised him to try to be faithful for at least the first year. In short, it's a place where people expect a little less of each other, and of marriage. Above all, they don't expect the privilege of unmixed feelings. Hence a country where analysts give different advice.

The analyst told Alistair that only the wildest optimist would divorce in order to remarry, presuming that things would be better next time round. Why should they be? Was there anything intrinsically unsuitable about his wife, anything intrinsi-

PERSONAE

I

The poet, mindful of the daring lives
Of bards who dwelt in garrets, drank in dives,
And bought in little shops within the means
Of working folk their soupbone, salt, and beans,
Becoming, in the cause of literature,
Adjunctive members of the laboring poor,

Ascends the platform now to read his verse
Dressed like a sandhog, stevedore, or worse,
And wears a collar of memorial blue
To give the brave bohemian past its due.

II

Musicians, who remember when their sort
Were hirelings at some duke's or prince's court,
Obliged to share the noble patron's feast
Belowstairs, or below the salt at least,
Now sweep onto the concert stage disguised
As those by whom they once were patronized:

How princely are their tailcoats! How refined
Their airs, their gracious gestures! And behind
The great conductor who urbanely bows
Rise rank on rank on rank of noble brows.

—Richard Wilbur

cally right about his mistress? Alistair's problems sprang from his Anglo-Saxon puritan upbringing, from the fact that he'd never been unfaithful before. This had led him to attach undue significance to the sentimental side of his new relationship in order to justify the betrayal of values—monogamy, integrity—that would not bear examination. He had "mythicized" it. What he must do now was take a few mild tranquillizers, settle down, and have another affair at the first opportunity, being careful to attach no more sentimental importance to it than an affair was worth—some, but not much. And keep it brief. Meanwhile, he might remember that he had an ongoing project with his wife. They were old campaigners. Think of the practical side. Think of your professional life. He told Alistair that every family was also a business, or *hacienda*, as the Spanish say, a family estate, a place where people share the jobs that have to be done.

Is such advice merely cynical? Or, in a very profound way, romantic? Old campaigners. Discussing it with Alistair after he had put in a decidedly lacklustre performance on the squash court, I felt it wise to agree with the analyst—at least about the ingenuousness of imagining that things would be better next time. I also told him that during the Italian referendum on divorce in 1974 one of the arguments against divorce put forward by some intellectuals was that it would change the nature of affairs. I tried to make him laugh. You'd never know if your mistress wasn't planning to become your second wife!

But visions of such consummate convenience leave little scope for myth and misery. Alistair had been *in love* with Chiara. He had given his heart. Such clichés do count for something, whatever an analyst says. Trying and failing one evening to have sex with his wife, unable to feel any stimulus at all, Alistair suddenly found himself telling her the truth. He didn't decide to tell her, as indeed he had decided nothing in this whole adventure. Everything had been done, usually after enormous resistance, under an overwhelming sense of compulsion. Perhaps this is the way with anything important. He told her the whole truth and got his catastrophe.

The wife was destroyed. Alistair had spared no details. She insisted he leave. He did, discovering as he did so what a large space home and children had played in his life. Most of this he struggled to fill with whiskey and Camel Lights in a lugubriously furnished apartment in a cheaper area of town. Legal proceedings had just begun when Chiara came back. At this point, there was a brief hiatus, since Alistair no longer felt the need to be in touch with me. He was happy, or so I heard later. He had won his dream. The hell with the analyst. The hell with squash. His wife was more than generous with access to the children; Alistair was more than generous with money. All was well—indeed, perfect. It was about three months before I got another call.

I SUPPOSE what fascinates me about divorce is how tied up it is with our loss, our intelligent loss, of any sense of direction, of any supposed system of values that might be worth more than our own immediate apprehension of whether or not we are happy. We are not ignorant enough to live well, or too arrogant to let old conventions decide things for us. For many of us, and especially for men, who do not bear children and do not breast-feed them, the only thing that is immediately felt to be sacred, the only meaningful intensity, or the last illusion, is passion. D. H. Lawrence puts this very simply in "Women in Love." Birkin says:

> "The old ideals are dead as nails—nothing there. It seems to me there remains only this perfect union with a woman—sort of ultimate marriage—and there isn't anything else."
>
> "And you mean if there isn't the woman, there's nothing?" said Gerald.
>
> "Pretty well that—seeing there's no God."
>
> "Then we're hard put to it," said Gerald.

Perfect union with a woman: over beers again, depressed and tranquillized, Alistair was explaining how he thought he'd got that, until one night after lovemaking when Chiara casually asked him if he wanted to know the real reason she had refused his initial proposal that they live together. It was because she had just started an affair with another man. With Alistair being married and mostly absent, that had been inevitable. She'd wanted to see how it would work out with this man—quite well, as it turned out. "Though he wasn't at your level in bed," she said, laughing. Alistair hit her.

Alistair now became obsessed by the fact that there really had been no great love. Quite gratuitously, Chiara had exposed the illusion around which he was rebuilding his life. She went on to confess to three or four other lovers during their affair. Why should she have put all her eggs in one basket, she asked. Alistair, who had never hit anybody, hit her again. The analyst explained to him that hitting her was his way of trying to preserve some sort of myth, albeit negative, about the affair—trying to insist on its importance. Disturbingly, Chiara appeared to like being hit. She came back for more, told him more. It took them another year and two trips to hospital to stop seeing each other. It was always Chiara who came back. Alistair told the whole story to his wife, and she commiserated. They made love. They started seeing each other more often, but without interrupting the divorce proceedings. Alistair began a long series of affairs whose main purpose seemed to be to relive the passion of the earlier affair, whose main purpose, perhaps, had been to rediscover the enthusiasm that had led him to marry in the first place.

Marriage and divorce are so tangled up with our sense of mortality. One lives such a short time, yet wishes to do everything, and then to recapture everything. Start again, the springtime says. Unfaithfulness never fails to rejuvenate. But if we start again too often nothing will be brought to completion. And happiness? That long-term monogamy is unnatural is something that every male of the species has felt. Yet where would we be without some repression? The perfect union begins again. Another intimacy beautifully galvanized by the unbridgeable distance between men and women. A radical incomprehension. The children arrive. There are disagreements. The project falters. Our biology cares little for wholesome values and domestic routine now that the reproduction is done. The sound of a river in the distance lifts your head from the loom. The sound of rushing water. Time to batten down the windows, sandbag the doors. Old campaigners will take their kids to baseball, or take up baseball themselves. Or piano. Or drawing classes. Or martial arts.

In a chaos of receding floodwater, Alistair surveys his rearranged landscape. He has the kids alternate weekends, eats regularly with them and their mother. Sometimes it's hard to tell whether they're separated or not. The analyst has become a friend, plays squash with Alistair and swaps stories of affairs over beers. His main boast is three in three days at a conference in Palermo. The divorce has come through at last. And, as divorcés will, both Alistair and his ex-wife assure me, perhaps a little too insistently, that this is the ideal solution. ◆

SHOWCASE BY
KWAKU ALSTON

READING AHEAD

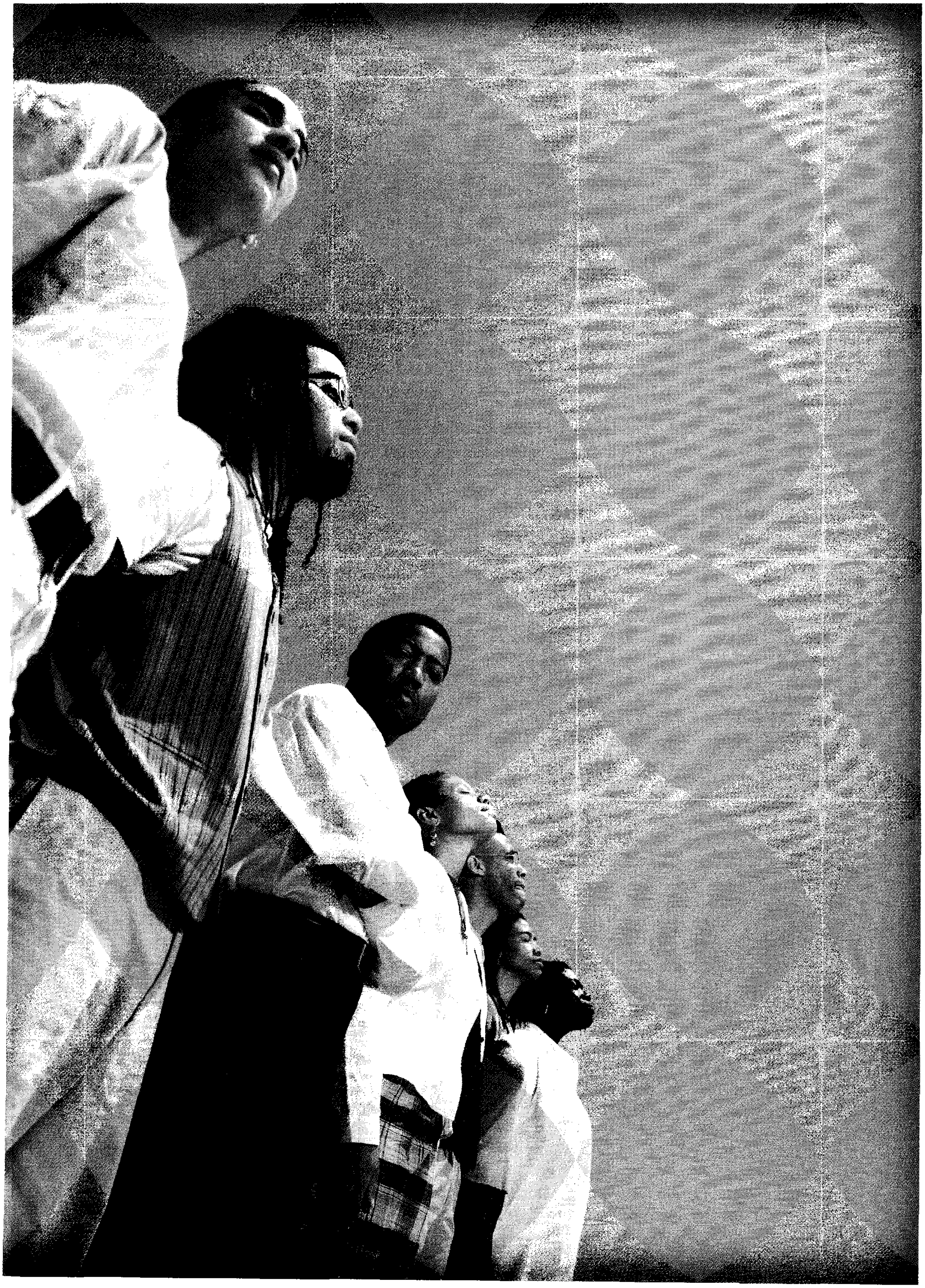
FANFARE, please. The poets in the photograph before you are young but are already in the vanguard of the perceived change in African-American writing. These poets—pictured, from left, Natasha Trethewey, Kevin Young, Major Jackson, Nehassaiu deGannes, Thomas Sayers Ellis, Sharan Strange, and Vera Beatty—are members of the Dark Room Collective. They constitute, along with seven other writers (including John Keene, Janice Lowe, and Artress Bethany White), a group that could well turn out to be as important to American letters as the Harlem Renaissance.

The group had its beginning in 1987, when Ellis and Strange, then undergraduates at Harvard, returned from the funeral of the novelist James Baldwin, a writer they greatly admired but had never met. Vowing that they would not fail to "claim" a writer of his stature again, and finding no real forum for writers of color in Cambridge, they eventually decided, along with Lowe, to transform the living room of a Victorian house they were sharing into a reading space. Then they invited older writers they admired, famous or not, and paired them in readings with younger writers. Such was the origin of an immensely rewarding exchange, as many leading African-American writers passed through the doors of that modest house, from Alice Walker to Derek Walcott. In this series of encounters, the two generations were able to draw strength from each other.

Although the members of the Collective are still young, they have amassed an impressive body of work and won a substantial number of awards. But if you check out the chemistry between them and other aspiring black authors at one of the many "drive-by readings" they have given around the country, it's clear that they are in this for more than trophies. As their influence spreads, they are marking a path for others to follow.

—CORNELIUS EADY

The Dark Room Collective, Boston, 1996.

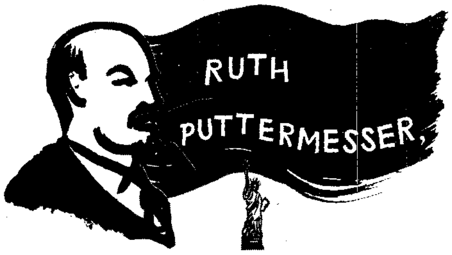


FICTION

SAVE MY CHILD!

The twentieth century, it is now believed, actually ended in 1989.

BY CYNTHIA OZICK



a white-haired New Yorker in her sixties—a retired lawyer, unmarried, cranky in the way of a woman alone—was as old now as her long-dead father: her father who, fleeing the brutish Russia of the czars, had left behind parents, sisters, brothers, all swallowed up in the Bolshevik silence, dwindled now into their archaic names and brittle cardboard-framed photographs. "Do not write anymore," Puttermesser's grandmother had pleaded more than six decades ago: "My eyes are gone. I am old and blind. I cannot read." This was the last letter from Moscow; it lay under the old Russian photos in an envelope blanketed by coarsely printed stamps. Each stamp displayed the identical profile of a man with a considerable mustache. Stalin. Puttermesser knew that the poet Osip Mandelstam had likened that mustache to a cockroach, whereupon Stalin ordered him murdered. Isaac Babel was murdered after months of torture and a phony trial. Mikhoels the Yiddish actor was murdered. All the Russian Yiddish poets were murdered on a single August night in 1952. Shot in the cellars of the Lubyanka.

And between Moscow and New York, a steady mute fright. The hidden warning in Puttermesser's grandmother's plaint was clear: *Stop! We are afraid of a letter from America! They will take us for spies!* The old woman was famous among her children for eyesight so sharp that she could see the alertly raised ears of a squirrel on a high branch in a faraway clump of trees. Puttermesser's father, too, had owned such a pair of eyes. Blue, pale as watery ink. Her poor orphaned papa, cut off forever from the ties of his youth: from his little brother Velvl, ten years old, his head in the photo shaved in the old Russian style, his school uniform high-collared and belted, with a row of metal buttons marching down his short chest. A family sundered for seventy years: the Great War, the Revolution, Stalin's furies, the Second World War, the Cold War—all had intervened. Puttermesser's papa, dying old of stroke, longed for his mother, for Velvl, for his sisters Fanya, Sonya, Reyzl, for his brothers Aaron and Mordecai. Alone in America with no kin. Never again to hear his father's thin, fevered voice. Continents and seas lay between Moscow and New York, and a silence so dense and veiling that in the three decades since her papa's death Puttermesser had almost forgotten she had Russian relations. They were remote in every sense. She never thought of them.

In the midst of that unstable period known as perestroika, when strange acts were beginning to flicker outward from a shadowy Soviet Union into the world at large, Puttermesser received a telephone call from Moscow. More than half a century without a letter; not a syllable; and now, out of the blue, out of the void, out (it felt) of *time*, the telephone rang (prosaically, unmiraculously) in an ordinary New York apartment in the East Seventies—Moscow! Forbidden, locked, sullen Moscow! A woman, panting, high-pitched, overwrought, was speaking in German, and Puttermesser was able to follow most of it; hadn't she, after all, read Schiller's "Maria Stuart" in college? The panicky electric voice belonged to Zhenya, the daughter of the late Sonya—Sonya, the younger sister of Puttermesser's papa. Zhenya was Puttermesser's own first cousin! Tremulous, Zhenya explained that she had no English, that she assumed Puttermesser had no Russian, that Zhenya herself, though now a pensioner, had been a teacher of German, but oh, the danger cannot be named, everything must be understood! "*Rette mein Kind!*" Zhenya wailed.

And so it was arranged: Puttermesser was to save Zhenya's child. She believed she understood from what. The old darknesses were creeping out all over a loosened Soviet Union; who could predict what mean-spirited ghosts of antique hatred were yet to be awakened? Certain newspaper accounts began to jump out at Puttermesser. In Kiev, young men passing under a window are flooded by the passionate sounds of a violin; they crash into the musician's flat and beat him unconscious. In Moscow, brainy students are shut out of the university by a relentless quota. Schoolchildren have their noses bloodied to the taunts of "*Zhid! Zhid!*"

And in New York—in the very hour of perestroika, of glasnost—Puttermesser picks up a joke that is at this moment circulating through Moscow: *Because there is a rumor of a delivery of meat, a long queue forms outside a butcher shop. After a four-hour wait, the manager emerges to address the crowd. "The meat hasn't arrived yet, but there won't be enough for everyone, so all the Jews must leave." Another four hours pass, and out comes the manager: "No delivery yet, but there won't be enough, so all the chronic grumblers against the regime must leave." Another four hours, and finally the manager announces, "Sorry, comrades, but there will be no meat delivery after all. Everyone go home!" And a great moan rises up: "Wouldn't you know it? The Jews are always getting favored!"*

How that poisonous joke with its bitter truths reverberated! How Puttermesser felt for Zhenya's child! She set herself, over several months, the task of letter-writing. She wrote to the State Department, she wrote to her congresswoman, she wrote to her two senators, she wrote to HIAS and NYANA. She visited offices and filled out forms. She emptied a closet and bought extra pillows and sheets and pushed aside chairs and hauled bookcases and made room for a new sofa bed. She listened in the subway for the consonants of Russian—once she grabbed the arm of a startled passenger and asked for the story of his life; but the fellow turned out to be a Pole. She went everywhere for advice, telephoned strangers, was warned against the obduracy of officialdom and the barriers to émigrés. Every

FILIP PAGOWSKI

day she schemed for the refugee's deliverance; and at night it sometimes seemed to Puttermesser, drained, insomniac, that she could switch on, like a light discovering a hidden stage, any scene from the past.

She saw her papa on a bed, lying on top of the quilt, with his hands under his head, the elbows jutting outward. He did not speak; his pale eyes were open to nothing. He never blinked. It was three o'clock; a big housefly was in the room, slamming itself against the window, the wall, the high mirror above the dresser. In the middle of the afternoon Puttermesser's papa had gone to bed to mourn. His mother was dead—Puttermesser's Moscow grandmother, whom she had never known, except as that dried-out brown photo in the drawer. So many dead: Puttermesser's papa; her papa's strangely Tatar mother; his shy and scholarly father, also reduced to a cracked old Russian photo (a sick man's face, solemn); all the lost aunts and uncles, the Muscovites, the wartime sufferers; Velvl in his school uniform, with large round pale eyes exactly like her papa's. Distant, oppressed, eclipsed. The scattered graveyards. Puttermesser's papa and mama in Staten Island; and where were all those others, how to imagine the cemeteries of Moscow?

The refugee arrived at one o'clock in the morning in the middle of October, ten months after Zhenya's howl of *"Rette mein Kind!"* In the empty street in front of her building Puttermesser stood waiting for the taxi from Kennedy. Wary, she kept fingering the wallet in the pocket of her cardigan.

The driver, without being asked, carried the refugee's bags—half a dozen of them—into the elevator.

"How much?" Puttermesser said.

"No problem. Fare's all taken care of."

"But she hasn't got any dollars—"

"She gimme *this*," the driver said, and pulled out a round plastic object. The face of it showed the head of Lenin against a background of the Kremlin, with two red stars in a silvery sky.

"It's a watch. A cheap quartz watch."

"You kiddin'? It's outta Mars, where d'you get to *see* a thing like this?"

Puttermesser was impressed. The driver was right; the watch was a trophy. The barter system had returned to Manhattan.

HER name was Lidia. She had flown on Aeroflot from Moscow to Bucharest to Prague. In Prague she switched to British Airways, which took her to Ireland for a two-hour refuelling; after Ireland and before New York she landed in Washington—her ticket was a complication of airports. Her visa was a complication of fibs: she had convinced the American Consul in Moscow that she would surely return—she was leaving behind a husband and two children. Sergei was the husband, the children were Yulia and Volodya. But she had no husband. In reality Volodya was her boyfriend. The Consul, she reported, was a nasty man. He looked at her as if she were a worm. He thought everyone who applied for a visa was trying to put something over on him; he suspected that all Moscow intended, hook or crook, to pour through the sacred gates of America and vanish behind them.

"You told him you had *children*?" Puttermesser marvelled. "You didn't have to say a thing like that."

"I want he give visa."

"When the visa's up we'll get you in legally. I've been working on it. If we need to, we'll get a lawyer," Puttermesser said; the fervor of salvation rose in her. "We'll ask for asylum."

Save my child! But it was no longer Zhenya's voice; it was the voice of Puttermesser's papa. The pathos—the Bolshevik upheavals, the German siege of Moscow, the hunger, the Doctors' Plot, the terror. *Rette mein Kind!*

"I get job," the refugee said. "I clean house for womans."

Puttermesser said doubtfully, "Would Zhenya want you to do something like that?"

"Mama, ha! What Mama want!"

Puttermesser was alarmed by such an eruption of mockery. There she stood, the Muscovite cousin, in the middle of Puttermesser's living room, a small space narrowed by the new sofa bed and shrunken still more by these heaps of suitcases and bundles and boxes tied with hairy Russian rope. An ironic beauty of thirty-three, trailing clouds of alien air—or, if not air, some nameless extraterrestrial medium. A Martian. She looked around, fierce and canny; she took things in. Puttermesser felt herself being judged by these sliding satiric eyes the color of Coca-Cola, and by that frail china-thin nose ending in a pair of tiny tremulous nostrils. It was the longish nose of a Mesopotamian princess.

Her full name was Lidia Klavdia Girshengornova. She was a species of biochemist—*eine Sportdoktorin,* Zhenya had said—and travelled all over the Soviet Union with her team: "my guys," she called them, big, coarse country boys, half-literate and wild. A B-level track team trying to work itself up to international status. Lidia tested their urine daily for forbidden steroids—or else, Puttermesser speculated, she made sure that her guys were properly dosed. She was careful not to drink with them, but she wrestled and joked around, and she liked going to distant cities, Tbilisi, Kharkov, Vladivostok, Samarkand; especially she liked the trips to the Caucasus, where the hotels had a hint of Europe. She was amazingly up-to-date. Her lipstick was very red, and her hair was almost red, short over the ears, looped over one eyebrow. She wore black tights and a long turtleneck sweater that fell to the tops of her thighs. Puttermesser had often seen this costume on Lexington Avenue at lunchtime, and privately wondered at how *normal* her young cousin seemed: hadn't she been swaddled on a board at birth, like all infants in backward Russia? Only her shoes were unmistakably foreign. They smelled of a Soviet factory.

IN the morning, Puttermesser set out her usual breakfast: toast and peanut butter. Lidia, suspicious, spread the yellow-brown stuff and made a horrible face. "What you call thees?"

"You've never had peanut butter?"

"*Nyet,*" said Lidia, so Puttermesser took her out to the supermarket. At quarter of nine it was mostly deserted.

"Pick out whatever appeals to you," Puttermesser offered.

But Lidia, oblivious, in a trance, was gaping down the long banks of freezers with their tall foggy doors, behind which lay mounds of spinach and broccoli and stringbeans and peppers and peas in richly bulging plastic bags. Her little nostrils fluttered as she moved past brilliant boxes of cereals and orderly, shining rows of bottled olives and pickles and mustards, past gardens of berries and melons. And when Puttermesser put out her hand to pluck up a packet of cheese, Lidia whirred out a furtive whisper: "No! Not to take!"

"What's the matter? It's Jarlsberg, you might like it."

"They will *see!*"

"For God's sake, we're not under surveillance, we're here to buy."

It developed that Lidia Klavdia Girshengornova had supposed they were visiting an exhibition hall. In Moscow, she explained, there were occasionally dazzling fairs and expositions: great public caverns set aside for gargantuan demonstrations of abundance, mainly foreign goods, strictly guarded. Hundreds came to gaze and marvel. To steal from a display, Lidia said, even the smallest item, could land you in prison.

The refugee had other misapprehensions. She thought the telephone was bugged; she was certain there was an official "listener" always on duty. She was innocent of polyester, and was astonished that the bedsheets were never ironed. She believed that every transaction had to be accompanied by a "gift." Her cases and boxes were cornucopias of shawls, scarves, colorful swaths of all sizes; varnished scarlet-and-black ladles and spoons handcarved out of hardwood, decorated all over with flowers; ugly but clever little plaster ducks and cows; nested hollow dolls shaped like eggs, without arms or legs, each encapsuling a smaller doll, until the last stood alone, a tiny Thumbelina. A circle of red spotted each miniature cheek, and each round head wore a painted babushka. Puttermesser was enchanted by these merry wooden faces redolent of old magical tales: dappled northern forests, silvery birdcalls and fragrant haycocks, a *Baba Yaga's* dark whim in an out-of-the-way cottage.

But Lidia gave her bundles an instantly entrepreneurial name: Russian folk art, she called it, with a salesman's snap in her voice.

Her voice was shrewd and deep, close to mannish. Puttermesser again felt herself being read by this voice; it took her measure with the speed of an abacus. Lidia, watching Puttermesser watching her unpack, held up one of the painted egglike dolls. "You like?" she asked. "You keep," and handed over the hollow doll with all its interior brood. A businesslike gesture. A payment.

Business was on Lidia's mind. "I tell before, I want clean for womans," she pressed.

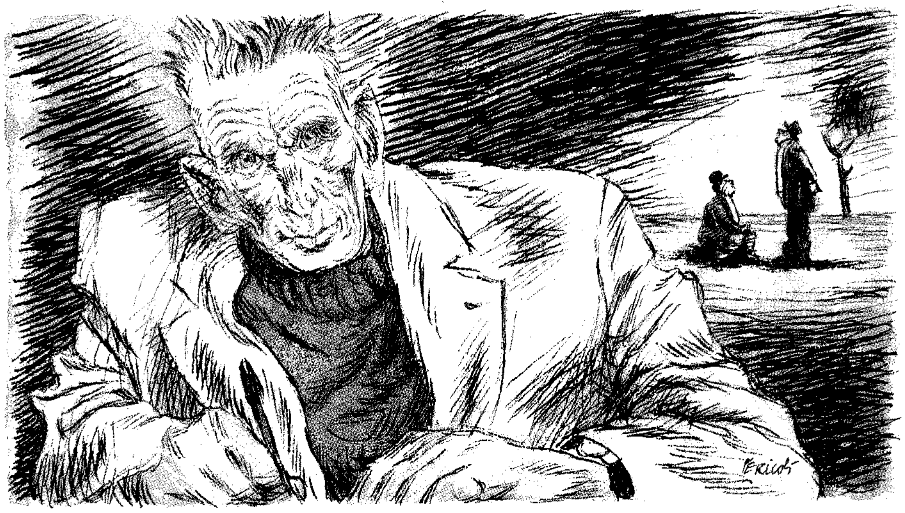
"But you can do better than that. Something in a laboratory, something that could get to be permanent—"

"Just like Mama!" Lidia laughed. She drew out a portfolio of photographs, many of them ragged and worn; Zhenya had sent them to show to Puttermesser. And here was Zhenya herself, sorrowing under summer sunlight, a puddle of shade under nose and lower lip. A dowdy

LETTERS • SAMUEL BECKETT

WHO IS GODOT?

"Waiting for Godot" was completed in 1949 but wasn't produced until 1953 (in French, in Paris). Before the play finally went into production, Beckett accepted an invitation from Michel Polac, the director of the avant-garde radio program Club d'Essai, to have parts of the play read over the air. Beckett, who refused to be interviewed about his work, wrote the first of these two letters as an introduction to the performance. The second is to Desmond Smith, who wanted to produce "Godot" in Canada.



Paris
1952

To Michel Polac

You ask me for my notions about "En attendant Godot," extracts from which you are doing me the honor of broadcasting at the Club d'Essai, and at the same time for my notions about dramatic art.

I have no notions about dramatic art. I am not versed in it. I am not a theatregoer. This is admissible.

What is probably less so, under these conditions, is first of all to write a play, and then, having done so, not to have the ghost of a notion about it either.

Such is unfortunately my case.

It is not given to everyone to be able to go from the realm that opens out under the page to that of profit and loss, then back again, unruffled, as one goes from the daily grind to idle pub talk.

I know no more about this play than anyone who manages to read it attentively.

I do not know in what spirit I wrote it.

I know no more about the characters than what they say, what they do, and what happens to them. About their looks, I must have indicated the little I have been able to catch a glimpse of. The bowler hats, for instance.

I do not know who Godot is. I do not even know if he exists. And I do not know if they believe he does or doesn't, those two who are waiting for him.

The two others who drop in towards the end of each of the two acts, that must be in order to break the monotony.

All that I have managed to be aware of, I have shown. It is not much. But it is enough for me, quite enough. I can even say that I would have fared better with less.

As for wanting to find in all this a broader and loftier meaning to take home after the performance, together with the program and the ice-cream stick, I cannot see the point in doing so. Yet it might be achieved.

I am no longer involved, and will never be again. Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo, and Lucky, their time and their space: if I did manage to get slightly acquainted with them it was only by keeping very far away from the need to understand. They may be answerable to you. Let them shift for themselves. Without me. They and I are quits.

(*Translated, from the French, by Edith Fournier.*)

April 1, 1956

DEAR MR SMITH

Thank you for your letter of March 5th.

I understand from Mr Rosset that

TULLIO PERICOLI

Mr Myerberg is opposed to your presenting the play in Canada prior to the New York production. I am sorry to hear this. However you will not have long to wait now.

I am afraid I am quite incapable of sitting down and writing out an "explanation" of the play. I think the simplest thing would be for you to send me a list of queries. My answers to some of these might cover a lot of ground. The trouble with most commentators is their failure to see the wood for the trees. Do try and see the thing primarily in its simplicity, the waiting, the not knowing why, or where, or when, or for what. If there are obscurities of detail their elucidation will never be in terms of a system of symbols. It is not in any sense a symbolic work. The point about Pozzo, for example, is not who he is, or what he is, or what he represents, but the fact that all this is not known, so that for a moment he can ever be confused with Godot. It is essential he should not be specified. It might even be said that he does not know himself who or what he is, and it seems to me that it is only out of a great inner dereliction that the part can be played satisfactorily. Confusion of mind and of identity is an indispensable element of the play and the effort to clear up the ensuing obscurities, which seems to have exercised most critics to the point of blinding them to the central simplicity, strikes me as quite nugatory.

There were, I thought, good things in the London production, in particular some good playing by Estragon and Lucky, but the set was quite wrong, and the timing, which is all important, I mean the giving full value to the silences.

I am not at all sure that the author's views are without danger for the director of production. Perhaps a wrong production, wrong for me, but with the coherence of your purely personal experience of the work, is to be preferred to one in which you try to combine with your own ideas others springing from a quite different conception. Nor is the author necessarily right. However if you feel like running the risk send along your questionnaire and I'll do my best to answer it. At least I can help you with difficulties in the script, if you have encountered any such.

With regard to rights of my next play, I am not at all sure that there will be a next. In any case you would have to apply to my publisher here, Monsieur Jérôme Lindon, Éditions de Minuit. ◆

plump aging woman in a patterned dress with a big collar. Flat face, eyes with the median Asian lid. Uncomplicated mouth, tightly shut; it made a narrow line. You could not imagine what this mouth thought or desired. But the woman in the snapshot seemed generations removed. She looked old-fashioned. She looked . . . Soviet. The others, Puttermesser's papa's brothers and sisters, did not. Fanya, Sonya, Reyzl, Aaron, Mordecai! And Velvl, his school uniform with the metal buttons, the very same picture Puttermesser had known all her life. And what, she asked, had become of Velvl? Run over, Lidia said, killed by a Moscow tramcar in 1951. He left no children, and his widow married a Georgian. There were no happy stories among these photos. So many familiar pale round eyes.

An ache fell over Puttermesser. It was grief for her papa's grief.

FOR emergencies, Lidia had brought along a Russian-English dictionary. She never consulted it. It appeared she understood everything, and in her peculiar fragmented English she could convey almost anything. She had learned these jigsaw phrases in a night class, but had left after only five weeks: there were so many better things to do on winter evenings in Moscow. You could go to someone's room and warm yourself with drink. A party, with strangers, for which you paid an entry fee. She had met her boyfriend in such a room, a communal flat with high old ceilings stippled with grimy plaster roses. Her boyfriend, Lidia said, was really *after* her; he was always pestering her to get married.

"Are you sure he isn't just looking for a chance to get out of the country?" Puttermesser asked.

Lidia beamed; surprisingly, her teeth were magnificent.

"He want go Australia," she said, and slid into laughter.

Sometimes the telephone would ring at four in the morning, and then Lidia leaped up from her sofa bed to catch it before it could wake Puttermesser. But Puttermesser always woke, and it was always Volodya.

"Can't he *count*?" Puttermesser said testily. "Doesn't he know what time zone he's in?"

"He afraid I stay in America," Lidia said. "He afraid I not come back."

"Well, isn't that exactly the point?"

"Just like Mama!"

Mama, Puttermesser was learning, was preposterous. It was not admirable to be just like Mama.

"Please, now we speak business," Lidia urged. "I want clean for womans."

The interviews began. Puttermesser put up a notice in the elevator: "Companionable Russian émigrée, intelligent, charming, lively, willing to clean house, babysit, general light chores. Reasonable. Inquire 3-C from 8 P.M."

Then she blotted out "Russian émigrée"—it was too literary, and smacked of Paris or Berlin in 1920 (she thought of Nabokov)—and wrote instead, "Soviet newcomer." The neighbors streamed in; Puttermesser was acquainted with few of them. A couple arrived carrying a small girl in pajamas and asked for a pot to warm milk in. The child broke into a steady shriek and Lidia dismissed them with a scolding; she didn't want to deal with *that*, she said. The bachelor journalist from 7-G, who occasionally nodded at Puttermesser in the lobby, confessed that he already had perfectly satisfactory help; what he was interested in was a chance to hear a grassroots view of Gorbachev.

"Gorbachev!" Lidia scoffed. "Everybody hate Gorbachev, only stupid peoples in America like Gorbachev," and threw open the substantial valise that occupied her nightly. It was crammed with cosmetics of every kind—eyebrow pencils, rouge, mascara in all colors, a dozen lipsticks, hairnets, brushes, ointments and lacquers in tubes and tubs. Puttermesser could identify few of these emulsions and was helpless before all of them. (But ah, look, so they *did* have such contrivances in the puritanical socialist state!)

The journalist retorted that Gorbachev was certainly an improvement on, say, Brezhnev; but Lidia went on creaming her pointed little chin.

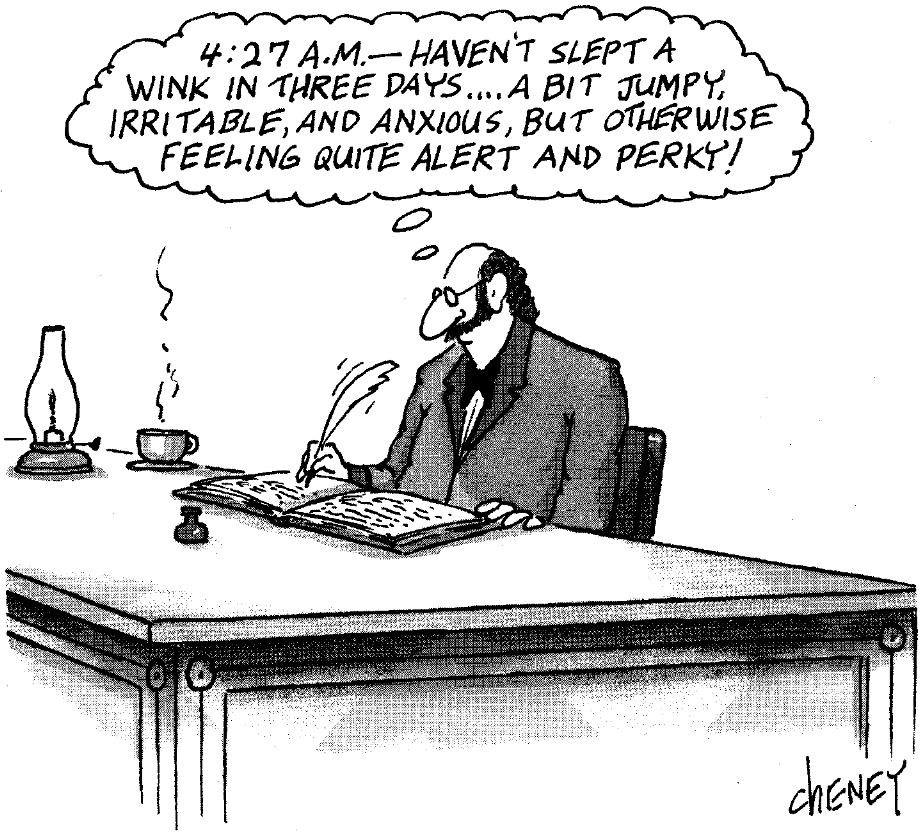
Puttermesser turned all around, like a cat in a cage. There was no place to sit down in her own living room. A pair of young men from the top floor were reclining on Lidia's sofa bed. One of them inquired whether she knew how to use a vacuum cleaner. Lidia laughed her scornful laugh—did they think she was a primitive?—and asked how much they would pay per hour.

It was difficult to tell who was interviewing whom. Lidia was after money, that was the long and the short of it. Day after day Puttermesser tried to lure her cousin out—to a museum, or to the top of the Empire State Building. But Lidia lifted an apathetic shoulder: she liked *things*, not pictures. And she had seen the New York skyline in the movies. She was waiting for evening, when the interviews would resume.

She settled finally on the family in 5-D: a three-bedroom apartment with three children. The husband did something in computers, and four times a week the wife took a bus downtown to Beth Israel Hospital, to work as a volunteer in pediatrics. They were a socially conscious, anti-violence couple; though easy and unrestrained with their children, they banned toy guns, monitored and rationed television, and encouraged reading and chess. Two of the children had piano lessons, the third was learning the violin. "Call me Barbara," the wife told Lidia, and embraced her, and said what a privilege it was for her family to be in a position to provide a job for a refugee. She promised that they were going to be friends, and that Lidia would soon feel at home in 5-D—but if she had any anxieties or complaints she should immediately speak up: there was nothing that could not be negotiated or adjudicated. Lidia was impatient with all this effortful goodness and virtuous heat. She had chosen the Blauschilds because they had offered her more dollars than anyone else.

"Varvara, ha!" Lidia yelped after her first day. "Foolish womans, teacher come for music, children hate!" And another time: "Dirty house! Children room dirty!" She had never in her life seen such disorder: shoes and shirts and toys left in heaps on the floor, every surface sticky, the sink always mountainous with unwashed pans and dishes, papers scattered everywhere. She disapproved of Varvara altogether—why would anyone work for nothing? And leave behind such a vast flat, so many rooms, and all for one family, they lived like commissars! Only dirty!

"You don't have to do this," Puttermesser said. "You didn't come to America to clean houses, after all. Look, we need to go see the people at the agency.


4:27 A.M.—HAVEN'T SLEPT A WINK IN THREE DAYS.... A BIT JUMPY, IRRITABLE, AND ANXIOUS, BUT OTHERWISE FEELING QUITE ALERT AND PERKY!
CHENEY

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. COFFEE

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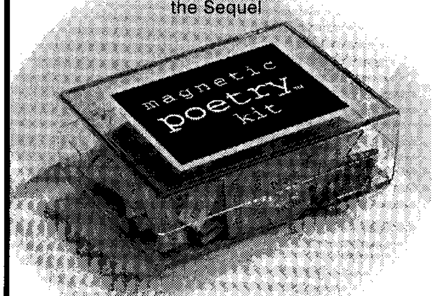

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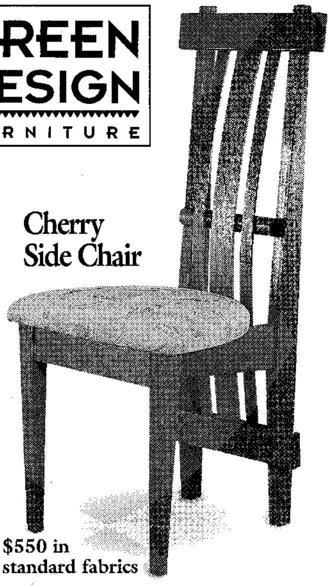

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To get you past the visa stage. It's about time we took care of it."

Lidia's brown eyes slid cautiously sideways. She lifted her shoulder and dropped it again.

PUTTERMESSER was privately glad of the four hours Lidia spent upstairs in 5-D every afternoon. Sometimes Lidia would talk of God and His angels, sometimes of the splendid old churches the Revolution had destroyed; and now and then she pulled out a certain dream book, which, if read prayerfully, could foretell the future. Lidia was a believer in the world of the sublime. She was moved by icons, by Holy Mother Russia. She told how she often wept at Eastertime, and how Jesus had once appeared to her in a dream, looking exactly like a holy painting on an ancient icon. At such moments poor elderly Puttermesser, with all her flying white hair, saw her Muscovite cousin as some errant Chekhovian character misplaced in a New York living room: *"How lovely it is here!" said Olga, crossing herself at the sight of the church.*

"But there's another side to all that, isn't there?" Puttermesser said. "What about the Beilis case?"

Lidia had never heard of the Beilis case.

Puttermesser, a reader of history, explained: "The blood libel. Pure medieval insanity. A Jew named Mendel Beilis was accused in a Russian court of killing a Christian child in order to drain his blood. Imagine, a thing like that, and in modern times, 1913! The clergy never intervened. So much for Holy Mother Russia."

Lidia sent out her riddling smile, half secretive, half derisive. "Not happen now."

"And the attack on the Writers' Union? That was just this year!"

Puttermesser knew what Lidia was thinking: Just like Mama.

On a rainy night toward the middle of November, they took the subway to the Bronx. Puttermesser had made an appointment with the agency for seven o'clock, so as not to interfere with her cousin's hours at the Blauschilds'. Lidia seemed nervous and reluctant. "We pay?" she asked.

"Not at all. It's a service organization. They hire some staff, but they're mostly volunteers."

"Like Varvara, work for nothing, foolish!"

In the cramped little office Lidia sat morosely in a cul-de-sac of filing cabinets, noiselessly snapping her scarlet fingernails. The woman behind the desk had a doctor's manner: her aim was to make a diagnosis followed by a recommendation. She was, she said, a refugee from the Soviet Union herself. She had arrived five years ago, and had a son in high school; he was currently on the math team at Stuyvesant. Her husband, formerly an engineer, was employed as a salesman in a men's-clothing store. The adjustment had been difficult, but now they were settled. They had even joined a synagogue—in Kiev such a thing was inconceivable.

Lidia looked away; all this was for Puttermesser. It had a seasoned professional ring. Except for a mild brush of accent, there was nothing foreign about the interviewer. The woman was stylish, in the way of the boroughs beyond Manhattan—she wore a scarf at her throat, meticulously knotted and draped, held by a silver pin in the shape of a lamb. She drew out several sheets of Cyrillic text and in a rapid cascade of Russian began to question Lidia. Puttermesser observed that her cousin was staring obsessively at the pin on the scarf; she was inattentive, lethargic. In Lidia's darkly unwilling mutter, Puttermesser heard, even in the unaccustomed syllables of Russian, a desultory streak of cynicism.

And then the Muscovite cousin rose up; and a roar of Russian galloped out of the cave of her mouth. The little office was all at once a Colosseum, with the smell of blood in the air.

"Good God! What was *that* all about?" Puttermesser demanded; she had restrained herself until they were nearly home. In the subway Lidia had made herself inaccessible. She pinched up her eyebrows. Her mouth narrowed into a tight line, like Zhenya's mouth in the snapshot. "Commissar!" she said.

They climbed the stairs in a stench of urine at the Seventy-seventh Street station, and nearly stumbled over a homeless man asleep on the concrete. The slanting rain wet his motionless face and neck. An empty bottle rolled past a muddy leg. Lidia hesitated; she was instantly cheerful. "Like in Soviet!" she cried, and Puttermesser understood that her cousin loved mockery best of all.

Lidia threw herself on her sofa bed and crumpled up the papers the inter-

Illustrations by Giselle Potter

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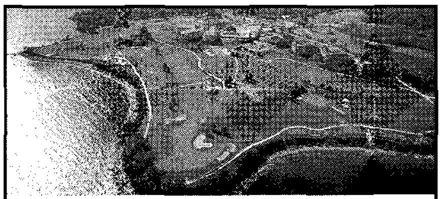

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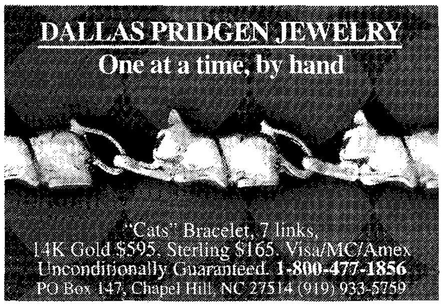

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viewer had given her and tossed them on the carpet.

"That woman only wanted to help," Puttermesser said.

"Rules. Much rules."

"Well, they must be worth it. *She* sounds happy enough over here."

"Such womans!" Lidia said. "Commissar!"

The living room was now Lidia's domain entirely. Puttermesser almost never went in there. It was strangely scrambled and unfamiliar, a briar patch behind a barrier of hedgerows—Lidia's boxes and bundles and valises and plastic bags with their contents spilling out. The sofa bed was always open and unmade, a tumble of blankets and pillows. Empty soda cans straggled across the top of the television. Orange sticks and an emery board lay on the edge of a bookshelf. Half-filled cups of coffee languished along the baseboards. Was this the Blauschild influence? Was chaos spawning chaos, 5-D leaching downward into Puttermesser's spare and scholarly 3-C?

But Puttermesser had another theory—the fault was her own. She had been too solicitous of her young cousin, too deferential. *Oh, that's all right, you don't need to think about that. Just leave it, I'll take care of it. Don't worry about it, you really shouldn't, it's fine the way it is.* These were the stanzas of Puttermesser's litany. It was incantation, it was "manners": she had treated Lidia as an honored guest, she had fallen at her feet—because she represented the healing of a great unholy rupture; because it was right that a rush of tenderheartedness, of blood-feeling, should pour into the wilderness of separation. To be blessed with a new cousin overnight!

The first week Lidia had grimly taken the broom—wasn't this what was expected? as a sort of rent?—and swept up after their meal. "Oh, please don't trouble," Puttermesser said each time. Thereafter Lidia didn't. She left the lids of her cream jars on the bathtub ledge. She left her dirty dishes on the kitchen table. She left her wet towels on the living-room credenza. It soon came to Puttermesser that her cousin, though spurning atheism, was otherwise a perfected Soviet avatar: she did nothing that was not demanded. Released, she went straight to the television and its manifold enchantments: cars, detergents, toothpaste, cheeseburgers, cruises. An exhibit more various and abundant than any to be seen in the great halls of Moscow, and all unnaturally vivid (no green so green, no red so red, etc.) against an alluring background of meadows, hills, rills, fountains, castles, Ferris wheels. The soda cans on top of the set multiplied. There was no reciprocity for Puttermesser's mandarin politesse.

"What did that woman at the agency *say*," Puttermesser pursued, "that made you explode like that?"

"She say make Lenin go in trash."

"Lenin? You weren't discussing Soviet history, for God's sake, were you?"

"Medals. I bring much medals."

Lidia spilled them out then: a whole rattling green plastic bag of little tin effigies of a small boy. The bag had a word printed on it: фотография.

"Lenin when child, you see? Komsomol prize for children. Junk! Nobody want! I buy hundred for kopeck." The mocking laugh. "Woman say not allowed do business, big law for tax. Commissar!"

EVERY morning Lidia ate black bread and sour cream—she had chosen these herself from the neighborhood exhibition—followed by strong tea with plenty of sugar. Then she disappeared. She was always back in time to go up to 5-D to clean for Varvara. She confessed that she had grown to hate Varvara's children. They were selfish, wild, indulged; they knew too much, and still they were common.

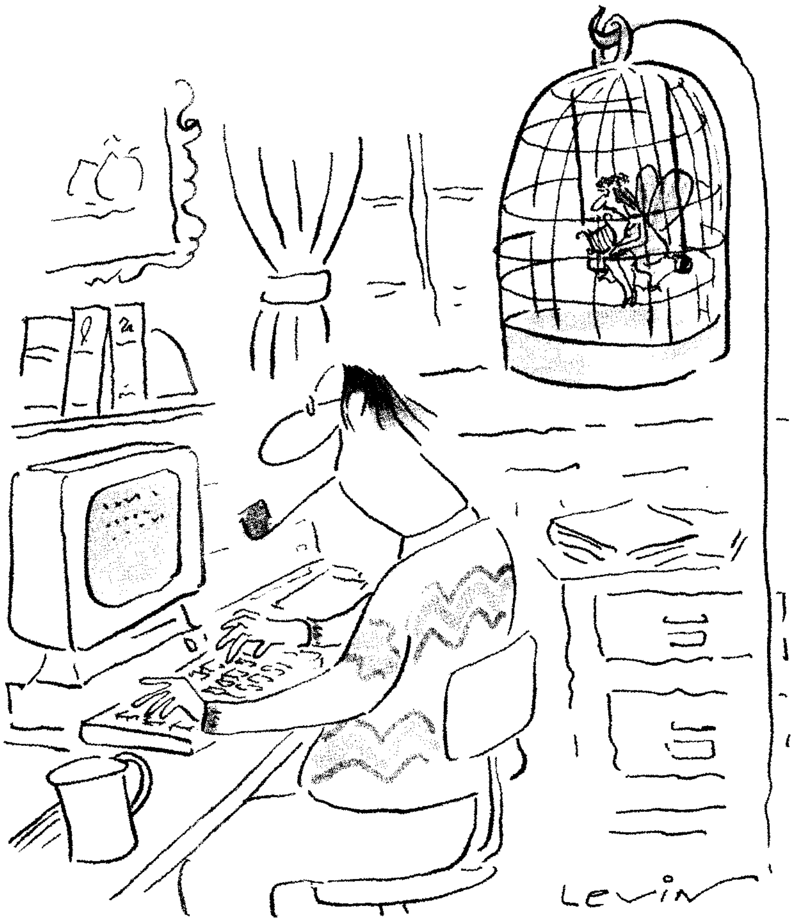
Puttermesser never asked about Lidia's absences. The scene at the agency had shown what questions could lead to. But she noticed that Lidia never went out without carrying one or two of her many bundles.

At eleven o'clock, when Lidia was gone, Varvara came down to see Puttermesser.

She glanced into the living room: "Mess! Looks like *my* digs! And you don't even have kids."

"Is there a problem?" Puttermesser said. "You don't have to be embarrassed, I mean if things aren't working out with my cousin—"

"Oh, Lidia's a jewel! I wouldn't *dream* of losing her. She's enriched our *lives*," Varvara said. "She just *fascinates* the kids. She tells them Russian fairy stories—they're pretty grisly, the wolf always gets to eat somebody, but the kids love it. And Bill and I don't mind. It's not really mayhem like the stuff they feed them on TV. It's just imagination, it's harmless."



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Puttermesser saw her cousin dissecting the limbs of Varvara's children via the surrogacy of lupine fangs.

Varvara peered past the kitchen. “Is Lidia home?”

“She's out for a while.”

“Taking in the Big Apple? That's nice. Hey,” Varvara said, “I just want to get the two of you to come to a very special party. A private fund-raiser for *Shechinah*. You know *Shechinah*?”

Puttermesser knew it. It was a magazine distinguished only by its advertising: “Politics against *Motherwit*”—*Motherwit* being a sober old periodical dedicated to rationalist traditions, cautious liberalism, and an impatience with ponytails.

“I told Sky about your cousin,” Varvara said. “Sky's a good friend of mine. We worked on the Neighborhood Visionary Project together years ago, when we all lived out in California. And before that we were both on the board of the All-University Free Expression Process, but that was before I met Bill. Bill *hates* Free Expression, he thinks it starts you on the road to violence. Bill's a *real* pacifist.”

Puttermesser recalled the Free Expression Process: it had flourished in the age of streaking. The Process specialized in “demonstrations” in which a forbidden word was chanted without pause for exactly two hours (“fuck” and “asshole” were the natural favorites); this was known as “neutering,” and the goal was to neuter all the naughty words.

“I remember their slogan,” Puttermesser said. “ ‘Everything Comes Up Crystal.’ ”

“Right! Wasn't that beautiful? And the other one, the one on the T-shirts? ‘Dirt Busters.’ Cute! Once we did a double Process on ‘turd.’ Four hours of it. ‘Turd, turd, turd, turd.’ Well, all that's long ago—B.K., before kids! We take baths with the kids, though. The whole family, two by two, cross-gender.”

Varvara looked to be in her forties. Her face was both large and small. Her cheeks and forehead were very wide, her chin was broad and long, but bunched in the middle of all that unused space were the crowded-together eyes, round little nose, round little mouth. A family of features snug in a big tub. You could not tell from such a visage—it was, in fact, a “visage,” a

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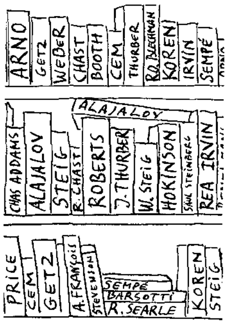
bit Dickensian, a touch archaic—that it belonged to an idealist.

Schuyler Hartstein, by contrast—Varvara's old friend—had exactly the sort of head one would expect of a social visionary. Puttermesser had happened on it now and again on television panel shows, a long-skulled baldish rectangle dangling a blond ponytail from its rear and (actually) a curly-ribboned monocle from its front. On such panels Sky—not an abbreviation but a metaphoric allusion to the cloudlessly vivid cerulean of his poet's orbs—always took the idealist position. In him there were no hesitations, reservations, qualifications, impediments. He had a sunny blond face and all the social thinker's certainties. Around his neck hung a gold chain, at the end of which swung the two Hebrew letters that spelled "life."



Puttermesser had subscribed to Sky's magazine, but quit after its first year, partly because she was indifferent to Sky Hartstein's verse—he published his own uplifting poetry in his own pages—but mainly because the radiance of the Divine Presence had begun to dim. He had started advertising in his own Personals columns for a wife, and meanwhile *Shechinah's* editorial positions were a mist passed off as "spirit," and sometimes as "rage." You knew before you opened the magazine that you would find the nasty anger of the purehearted.

"Wait'll you meet him!" Varvara crowed. "He's got this *mind.*"

"But why does he want to meet Lidia?"

"Oh come *on,*" Varvara said. "Isn't it obvious?"

When Lidia returned some hours later, she was not alone—she was pulling along behind her a tall young man.

"Pyotr," Lidia pronounced.

"Hiya," the young man said. He held out his hand. "I'm Pete. Peter Robinson. I manage the Albemarle Sports Shop. Over on Third? Third and Ninety-fourth?"

"Pyotr," Lidia repeated. "Have *clean* eyes."

It was true; Lidia had hit on it exactly. Those were innocent eyes, guileless and unsoiled by wit. Pete Robinson—Pyotr—explained that he was from North Dakota, and was better acquainted with woods and farms than with the New York pavement. He had been in the city—had been transferred from the Seattle branch—less than three months. Back home, and even in a place like Seattle, you would never get to run into someone like Lidia!

The three of them settled around the kitchen table. Pyotr wore a sweater with a V neck and under it a plaid wool shirt. He had a big pale slab of a brow with a lick of shiny hair bouncing down over it like a busy tongue. He seemed as clarified and classified—as simplified—as a figure on a billboard. And Robinson—Puttermesser thought of that radio series of her childhood: Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy! As quick as you could say Jack Robinson, her cousin had landed his prototype.

Lidia was joyful. "Pyotr help," she said.

And once again she turned the green plastic bag upside down—the one with фотография printed on it. This time not a single medal depicting the child Lenin fell out. Instead, a stream of green bills: all-American money.

"What's going on?" Puttermesser said.

"Ma'am?" said Pyotr. "This young woman's been working in my store all day. I've got to get back there myself pretty soon. She lured me out with that smile."

Puttermesser gave her cousin a skeptical look. "What is it, another job?"

"Ma'am," Pyotr explained, "we were getting ready for Christmas, clearing out the tennis racquets and ski poles from the middle of the floor. Nice big space, it's where we're putting the *tree.* Well, we get the tree up, and in comes this little cutie with this funny way of talking, and next thing you know she's in business. Right in the biggest traffic area."

"Traffic area?" Puttermesser said.

Pyotr nodded. "You bet. If you don't mind my saying so, what you've got in this young woman is free enterprise, the real thing."

Sitting at a card table he had found for her, under a Christmas tree decorated with colored light bulbs in the shape of miniature sneakers and footballs, the Muscovite cousin had sold—in a single morning—her whole stock of Lenin medals. For three dollars each. What lay strewn on Puttermesser's kitchen table were three hundred American dollars. And her cousin still had, in inventory, plenty of scarves and spoons and limbless hollow dolls.

Not to mention an all-American boyfriend.

THE *Shechinah* fund-raiser was held in one of those mazy Upper West Side apartments where it is impossible to find the bathrooms. You wander from corridor to corridor, tentatively entering bedrooms still redolent of their night odors. Sometimes there will be a bewildered young child standing fearfully in your path, or else a small animal, but mostly you encounter nothing but the stale smells of an aging building. Such apartments are like demoralized old women shrouded in wrinkles, who, mourning their lost complexions, assert the dignity and importance of their prime. The bathroom sink, if you should happen to locate it in the dark (the light switch will be permanently hidden), is embroidered with the brown grime of its ancient cracks, like the lines of an astrological map; the base of the toilet, when you flush it, will trickle out a niggardly rusty stream. And then you will know how privileged you are: you have been touched by History. Arthur Rubinstein once actually lived here; Einstein attended a meeting in what is now the back pantry; Maria Callas sang, privately, on a summer night, with her palm pressed down hard on that very windowsill; Uta Hagen paid a visit to the famous tenant, whoever it was, before the present tenant.

"Kakoi teatr!" Lidia cried; she was leading Pyotr by the hand. He followed docilely, shyly, dazzled by the doubly exotic: enigmatic New York, where a Muscovite beauty could suddenly swoop you into mysterious rooms! This one was spacious and carpeted: rows of folding chairs, sofas pushed against the walls, and long maroon draperies drawn over two sets of windows, like twin curtained prosceniums. A fresh copy of *Shechinah* had been placed on each chair.

The evening's host, a woman in her middle fifties, dressed in jeans, a creased shirt, and several rings and bracelets, materialized out of the lost rear recesses of the apartment. Puttermesser picked up the magazine she had been sitting on and began to riffle through it, until she came

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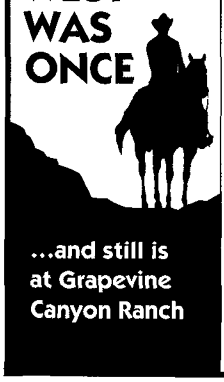

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on one of the poems Sky Hartstein liked to sprinkle through each issue:

> The unneeded
> are needed
> for our satisfaction.
> We are bloated
> with such satisfactions.
> Enough!
> Let us turn
> and satisfy ourselves
> with the sublime.

The title was "The Marginalized."

Pyotr was caressing Lidia's raw little hand, each finger with its blood-red hood. Lidia wore her reddest lipstick and her most detached smile; she was fondling the buttons of her new leather coat. The polished leather shone like black glass. She had bought the coat in a shop on First Avenue run by immigrant Koreans—Varvara had told her where to find it—and had paid for it with the profits from her Lenin medals. The label said "Made in China": sewn, for all anyone knew, by eight-year-olds chained to their machines.

The introducer in jeans was just finishing her money pitch—"Remember, Sky's the limit!"—when, in thickening applause, Sky Hartstein ascended out of his chair. It was, he began, "for me personally," an amazing week. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had granted Sky an audience, and what do you suppose they talked about? Those little toy cars you operate by remote control, how they are subject to movement by an invisible force. . . . Consider how they stand for the power, from afar, of divine influence drawing on human will. . . . Sky Hartstein's speech rushed on, a torrent of sweetness and light. He swept the Beatles into the Psalms and the Prophets into organically grown vegetables. He quoted from Blake and recited the sleep-giving properties of melatonin. Let all borders dissolve, he cried, let the nations vanish away. Let glasnost spread its healing tent over the earth and restore us to classlessness and the end of want—let the poor rise up from their wretchedness according to the verdant primal promise of that genius who once labored long in the British Museum! Karl and Groucho, Lenin and Lennon: Sky ventured this little joke, he didn't care how stale.

Everyone knows, he went on, about the excesses of Stalin, the Gulag, the terror, the K.G.B., informers, shadows, spies, interrogators, torturers; and yet in an early time, before the betrayal of the noble scheme of universal aspiration, there *must have* been a little holy seed of human redemption. The Great Experiment failed in its first venue, yes, but is it possible that the seed might be replanted?

"Even for one born into the Experiment," he said, "there must cling some small remnant of its beginnings. The Revolution leaves a trail, a wisp, an aroma of what was *meant*." He was looking in Lidia's direction, widening his arms.

Lidia, meanwhile, had jumped out of her chair. "You think was in old days clean?" she cried. "Never clean, no! Stupid mans! Stupid womans!"

Someone began to hiss. The host in jeans, worrying about the disruption of her party—a table at the back of the room was stacked with oatmeal cookies and a wholesome pyramid of apples—broke in plaintively: "But wasn't Communism once a beautiful hope? At the start? In principle? With goals that are viable still—"

Lidia laughed.

"Foolish American peoples!" she yelled. "In Soviet stupid peoples more smart! My guys on team more smart!"

Varvara whispered furiously, "Sit down! You're ruining the meeting!"

"Communism!" Lidia yelled. "What Communism? Naïve! Fairy tale always! No Communism, never! Naïve!"

There she stood, her pointed little chin in the air, her elbows firm: a St. Joan of disillusionment, a commissar of mockery, a perfected Soviet flower. She trusted no one, she trusted nothing. She was no more rooted than a dandelion's head when it has turned into feathers and is ready to fly. For the first time Puttermesser liked her cousin nearly as much as she deplored her.

IN the middle of the night the telephone rang. Puttermesser found herself catapulted out of a fierce dream of waves and waves of barbed wire. It crisscrossed the windows, closed off the kitchen, and surrounded Lidia's sofa bed. Thirsty, heading for a drink of water, Puttermesser leaped over the wire and caught her shin on one of the twisted barbs. Blood was spilling down her ankle. . . .

It was Volodya, calling not from Moscow but from Sakhalin. Sakhalin, the czars' penal colony, where Chekhov had gone to investigate prison conditions. A distant island in the inconceivable Sea of Okhotsk, below the Arctic, its southern tip irritably fingering Japan. Talk about

Mars! Puttermesser turned in her bed, drove off the bad dream, and listened to the murmur of Russian. Lidia in Russian was a different Lidia: she flew among the rococo gasps and trills of those brilliant syllables as lightly as a gymnast. Her laugh, embedded in Russian, was a different laugh: it was free to do its stunts.

"*Do svidanya*," Lidia breathed out—it was a sly caress—and hung up. "Volodya want do business in Sakhalin," she explained.

"Don't people get arrested for trying that? Isn't it dangerous? Zhenya's grandmother—" Then Puttermesser remembered that Zhenya's grandmother was her own grandmother, too: an old woman in a black babushka skittering across the iron crust of snow again and again, a snatch of movie reel played over and over.

The thirst in her dream had pursued her into the kitchen. She filled the kettle for tea and put out two cups. The windows, cleared of their silver thorns, were black. It was half past three.

"You don't mean *private* business," she said. "Isn't that what they call economic crime—"

Lidia released her amiable shrug. "Perestroika," she said.

"Really? People aren't afraid of breaking the law anymore?"

"Apparatchik rules," Lidia spat out. "*Volodya* not afraid!"

"But I thought you said he was thinking about leaving the country. Going to Australia."

"First get much rubles. First Sakhalin."

"I don't suppose you can buy a leather coat in Sakhalin," Puttermesser said, pouring the water over the leaves and letting it darken to mahogany. She didn't mind that her cousin had converted her away from tea bags.

"I buy coat in America, give Volodya."

"You're out of a job now," Puttermesser said mildly.

They sipped their tea. Lidia produced the half-dozen oatmeal cookies she had been slipping into the pocket of her new coat at the moment Varvara was firing her.

"Foolish Varvara," Lidia said. Nibbling her cookie, she looked almost childlike.

"Well, what did you expect? The woman invites you to the center of her life and you insult everyone in sight. The way you answered Sky Hartstein. *Shechinah's* getting famouser and famouser."

"*Pravda* also famous," Lidia said.

And in that instant Puttermesser understood her dream. All that barbed wire! It was a platitude of a dream. She had transformed her apartment into the Gulag—it was that simple, so stupidly transparent that it would make Freud yawn. And the eeriness of a call from a former penal colony just as she was bleeding on barbed wire!

"That book you've got?" Puttermesser said. "That dream book?"

Lidia, electrified, dashed through the hedge of her bundles to fetch it. It occurred to Puttermesser that she had finally struck home with her cousin. Until now, she had been a harassment and a bore. How old and irrelevant she must have seemed to a flirt, a foreigner, a beauty!

Lidia returned with the book in her hands as if she were displaying a crown on a cushion. Here was a believer; the cynic had vanished. "What in dream? I look, I find."

Puttermesser waved all around. "Barbed wire. All over the place. Across the windows, everywhere. I got cut on it and blood poured out. I mean *poured*."

Lidia considered; she put her head down to study what appeared to be an index of dream topics.

"Does it list barbed wire?"

"*Nyet.*"

"Prison?"

"Prison not in dream. Dream here, in house." Lidia bent over the pages, turning them so slowly that the ceiling light flashed off each one. "Ah," she said. "*Krov.*"

"What's that?"

An elongated vowel lingered. A ghostly word. "Blooood," Lidia said. "Where blooood come?"

"No, no," Puttermesser said crisply. "It isn't 'blued.' It doesn't rhyme with 'food,' it rhymes with 'mud.' Out of my leg. My foot. My toes."

"*Khorosho*," Lidia said. "Better from foot. Blooood from head mean you dies." She stopped to study some more; she was uncommonly serious. "Peoples dream blooood from foot, they make holy future. You holy womans. You"—she struggled to translate—"saint."

Puttermesser stared; her ironic cousin was altogether drained of irony. Her cousin was . . . what was she? Anything shoddy, anything that broke at a touch, any part that failed, the switch on the living-room wall that suddenly gave out, the leak in the kettle, a crack in the plaster, the bus that was late in coming—all these were occasions for Lidia's satiric call: *Like in Soviet!* Proof of a corrupt and shabby universe. Puttermesser knew what her cousin was—an apparatchik of blemish and smirch, wart and scab, disdain and distrust. *Like in Soviet!* She was either too suspicious or too credulous. She was

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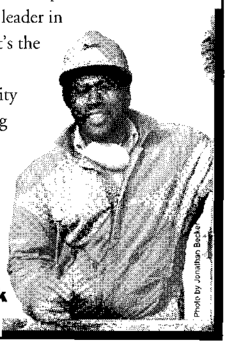

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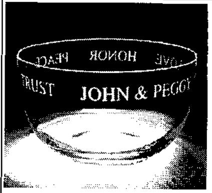

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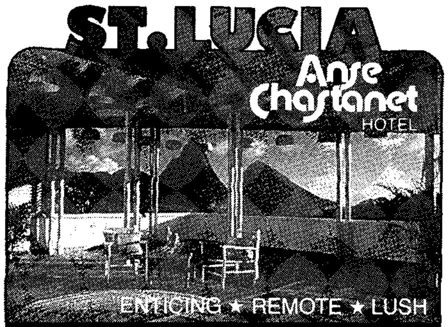

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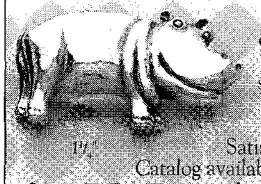

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a skeptic who put her faith in charlatanism.

"I think," Puttermesser said darkly, "you would be a lot better off throwing out such a silly book and getting hold of an English grammar instead."

Lidia's eyes swelled. She slapped the dream book shut. "What for I need English? I go Sakhalin with Volodya! Make big business in Sakhalin!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Volodya say come, get much rubles. Marry, maybe."

A gray blur had begun to brighten the windows. It was still too early for dawn, but the blackest hours of night were receding, and in that morning light that was not quite light, spun together with the sharp cartoonlike brilliance of the ceiling fixture, Lidia had a phosphorescence of her own.

"You came for asylum! You came to escape!" Puttermesser said. "For God's sake, Lidia, what do you think this is? *A vacation*?"

"I come work," Lidia contradicted.

"You're here as a refugee."

"Refugee? What mean refugee?" Her face was a lit stage; every filament of her hair burned red. "Zhenya? Zhenya say this? I am emi-*grant* like you is holy womans," Lidia blazed, and stretched out her long, long laugh, as elongated as the vowel in "blooood," as crucial as inspiration. "What Mama say! What Mama want!"

IN the end Pyotr wept. Lidia had been gone only a day; she had managed her ticket—New York to Moscow, a direct flight—all on her own.

"This Korean place on First Avenue?" Pyotr said. "She asked me to go over there with her. To try on this *coat*. That was only the day before yesterday."

"Did she mention that you and her boyfriend are about the same height?" Puttermesser asked.

"I mean, I knew it was a present, but I didn't know who *for*. She said it was for her brother in Moscow. She said she was having it shipped."

"Lidia doesn't have a brother."

"All the time she was planning to leave."

"But not before clearing a profit," Puttermesser said.

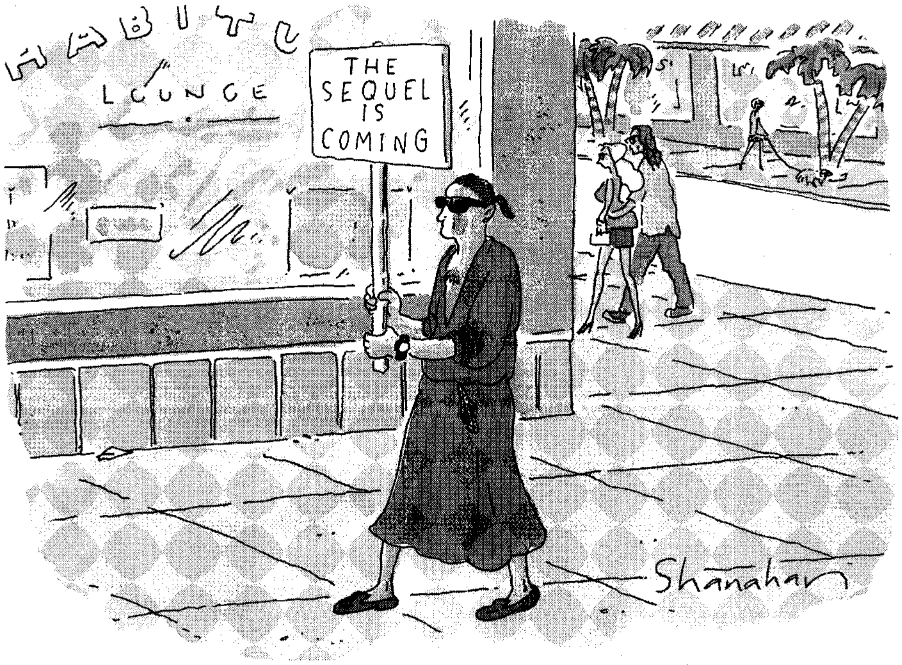
"Those dolls went like hotcakes. She must've made around nine hundred dollars off them, never mind what she got for the rest of the stuff. She walked out of my place with maybe two thousand clear."

They were sitting in Puttermesser's living room. It was, in its way, another tea party, but there was booze in the teacups. Pyotr had brought along a bottle of vodka to celebrate with Lidia; it was a month ago to the day that she had revealed herself in the Albemarle Sports Shop.

But Lidia was far above the round earth, heading for the land of perestroika.

Crumpled plastic bags littered the carpet. The sofa bed was an anarchic jumble of cushions and twisted sheets. Ripped pairs of panty hose sprawled gauzily over a parade of Coke cans. Lidia's various scents—lotions, nail polish, hair spray—wafted like the wake of an apparition.

"She didn't even tell me she was going," Pyotr wailed.



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Puttermesser looked into Pyotr's clean, wet North Dakota eyes. Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy: gulled.

"The Great Experiment," she said, and emptied what was left of the booze into poor Pyotr's innocent cup.

FROM Tel Aviv, in German (Puttermesser's translation):

Hotel Royale
23. Juni

Liebe Ruth!

As you can see, because of the pressure of circumstances I have emigrated to *das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn* (Goethe). I have been here only two days. Lidia is now living in Sakhalin. She is six months pregnant, and she and Volodya (her boyfriend since last year) will marry very soon. He is very busy setting up a business with other ambitious young men. You probably do not know, because until now it has been kept secret, that a number of paleolithic mammoth tusks have been dug up by farmers in Sakhalin. Volodya has bought the tusks from the locals and plans to resell them in the West. I am told that these tusks are very beautiful and actually resemble fossilized wood. Lidia is somewhat doubtful about their authenticity, but she believes they can easily be passed off as such to potential collectors, since value is as value seems.

I am glad she is safe in Sakhalin, safer than she would be in America. Lidia told me that she was forced to attend an extremely dangerous political meeting in New York. She said she was made to travel to a distant place at night, where a woman official of some unsavory organization tried to dragoon her into signing certain papers—a scheme of indenture, apparently. I am very dismayed to hear of such things in your country.

The night I left Moscow there was a riot in our street. This is because the U.S.S.R. is falling apart. Some say the death knell has already been sounded. [In the original: *das Totengeläut ist schon verklungen.*] The rioters shouted unpleasant slogans and wore unpleasant uniforms and broke many windows. I thank God that Lidia, who did not wish to accompany me here, is for the time being in quiet Sakhalin. Who knows where fate will finally place her? She confided to me that the baby is regrettably not Volodya's, but assures me that you, dearest Ruth, know who the father is, and that he is a nice boy.

I will write again when I begin to understand this new place. In the meantime, please write *auf Deutsch* to the above address (it is an absorption center for new immigrants) and tell me all you know about the baby's father. Lidia says he has a typically Russian name and sells icons for a living. Where in America could she have unearthed such a person?

Your newfound cousin,
Zhenya ♦

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OF HUMAN BONDAGE

Ian Fleming, James Bond, and the England that made them.

BY ANTHONY LANE

WHO reads James Bond these days? More to the point, who knows that it is possible to read James Bond at all? Watching Bond is easy enough, and imitating him is kind of fun, if you can take the vodka. But *reading* him—well, apart from anything else, it sounds so un-Bondish. You don't catch 007 settling down for an early night with a cup of tea and a Stendhal. He is known to be a big fan of "Scarne on Cards," and he once consulted that noble volume for a full half hour before fleecing Sir Hugo Drax of fifteen thousand pounds at Blades, in St. James's, but that was work. Bond could no more immerse himself in a novel than he could feed a .45 slug into the chamber of a Colt Detective Special. And yet he was born in a book—"Casino Royale," which appeared in 1953. His publisher boasted that one copy was sold every six and a half minutes. There were thirteen more Bond titles to follow, and they became an industry unto themselves. Soon after Kennedy was elected President, *Life* ran a list of his ten favorite books: there, at No. 9, stood "From Russia, with Love." By the time the movie of that name was released, in 1963, there were more than ten million Bond paperbacks in print in America. They had brought glamour and, it was presumed, immortality to the names of James Bond and of his creator, Ian Fleming.

A few weeks ago, I traipsed around the bookstores of New York in search of Bond. Five times, I drew a blank: nothing under "Fleming," either in the fiction section or among the other thrillers. At the sixth attempt, I came across a hardback set of the novels that had been remaindered at less than four dollars a copy. Nobody, it appears, wants Bond on the page anymore, apart from the antiquarians. Here is a man whom SMERSH and SPECTRE would track to the ends of the earth, but the only readers who hunt him down these days are collectors of first editions, who will pay hundreds of dollars for a mint early Bond, unfoxed and preferably unread, with the dust jacket in perfect condition. You could argue that the decline of Bond coincided with the last rites of Communism, from which he drew his staunchest foes, but the truth is that 007 is riding higher than ever in the cinemas, and therefore in the public mind—a ride that is pulling him ever further away from the mind that conceived him. Fleming's fiction, both in spirit and in detail, is now deemed to be so outdated that I should probably have looked for it on the history shelf. James Bond is doing just fine; it is Ian Fleming who needs help.

Here, to the rescue, comes Andrew Lycett, who has written a solid new biography, entitled "Ian Fleming: The Man Behind James Bond" (Turner; $24.95). Lycett's task is to restore a reputation, and he begins in full flag-waving mode, declaring in his prologue that Fleming was "a chameleon-like showman who presented the side of his character he thought people wanted to see." This is unfair both to chameleons, who devote so much of their energy to not being seen, and to Fleming himself, who seems to have spent most of his time getting his own way and not giving a damn. Not only did he tell the steward on the Twentieth Century how to mix a Martini, for example, but he did so all the way from New York to Albany. "Wonderful ideas and wrongheaded arguments, tremendous charm and occasional shocking manners; a very good mind which I fear will never expand to capacity owing to an unfortunate adroitness at short cuts and a gift for well-organized leisure": that was the steel-tipped verdict delivered by his wife, Ann, and it makes Fleming sound close to impossible—bereft of the stamina, courtesy, and strange tranquillity of Bond. Lycett also quotes an anonymous partygoer from the mid-fifties: "Ian Fleming. Writes terrible books. Handsome in an 'old shoe' kind of way. Very forward with the ladies. Loves black lingerie." That's more like it.

IAN LANCASTER FLEMING was born in Mayfair in 1908. His mother, Eve, was a terrifying mixture of the aesthetic and the formidable; his father, a banker and a Conservative M.P., came of rich Scottish stock and died on the front line in 1917. True to his genes, the young Ian—indeed, the Ian of all ages—swerved back and forth between a chappish bluffness and a surprising, if slightly strained, weakness for more rarefied pursuits. Few schoolboys complement a precocious athletic success, as Fleming did at Eton, by publishing a magazine that contained a poem by Vita Sackville-West. (It also contained a sketch by Augustus John, with whom Ian's widowed mother conducted a lengthy affair.) There is a tradition in England which states, not always convincingly, that arty types are required to loathe their public schools, whereas the hearties must have a rousing time and barely drag themselves away. Fleming, needless to say, was reluctant to settle in either camp; when his friend Paul Gallico prefaced a Bond compendium with an essay on Fleming that referred to his "implacable distaste for Eton," Fleming took the manuscript and changed those first two words to "mysterious affection."

Within that tiny revision—a brilliant find by Lycett—you can spy not just the torn complications of Fleming himself but the even more thwarted temperament of his most distinguished offspring. There is no point, as this biography demonstrates, in trying to map Bond closely on Fleming's character, yet both men grew to be grand masters of distaste, struggling manfully to discover anything, or anyone, able to command and keep their mysterious affection. The Bond books are invariably chided for their snobbery, but I find that their most touching legacy, for it is born not of breeding but of fear: it is Bond's heart rather than his job which draws him away from too close an engagement with the world. His preferred rapport is not with the passing goddesses and their comedy names (Domino, Honeychile, the unam-

MAGNUM PHOTOS INC.

Fleming in 1957. We should be grateful that he became a writer and never thought of going into politics. Photograph by Erich Hartmann.

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biguous Pussy), or even with Tracy, the wild child whom he marries and loses at the end of "On Her Majesty's Secret Service," but with his fellow-professionals on the opposing side, those who have registered equal contempt for an ordinary existence. Tracy's embrace suits him less than the poisoned blade that slides from the toe cap of Rosa Klebb.

So what does Bond love? The same things as Fleming, I guess: England, or England as it was, or an idea of England; men without women in a London club, savoring their claret and losing their unearned money with good grace at the gaming tables; "grilled soles, oeufs cocotte and cold roast beef with potato salad." Fleming set similar limits to his taste: when he lured potential conquests back to his bachelor pad, it was always the same old menu—sausages or kedgeree, champagne, coffee, bed. How he could tell a sausage girl from a kedgeree girl is not recorded. There is something paranoid—joyless, indeed—in joys so precisely regimented, but such were the patterns by which Fleming measured out his days and nights in the London of the nineteen-thirties. After Eton, he devoted himself to the pursuit of loucheness: military training cut short by the clap, the polishing of his languages at the universities of Munich and Geneva, and a raffish spell with Reuters, where a typical assignment required him to act as navigator on the Alpine motor trials.

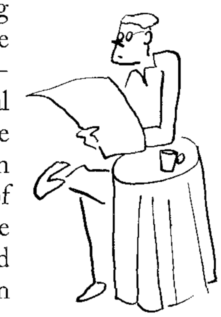
From Reuters it was a short, if mood-lowering, move across to the City, where Fleming became, according to a friend, one of the worst stockbrokers in existence. The book's account of the young rake going into business—"His most important contact was the autocratic Lancy Hugh Smith, third son of Hugh Colin Smith, Governor of the Bank of England from 1897 to 1899," and so on—shows that Lycett is one of those awesome fact hogs who dig up details that were perfectly content to lie buried in eternal gloom. When Fleming has an affair with a certain Maud Russell, we immediately learn all about the backgrounds of the partners of her husband's merchant bank. Yet this tendency toward excess, which fattens "Ian Fleming" to the bursting point, is not really a cause for regret, because it provides a useful service: it can hardly help reminding you of the perpetual, enthralling overkill of Fleming's fiction. What Lycett does with bankers and big-chinned aristocrats, Fleming did with everything under the sun, and under the belt, and over the counter. If you sit down and read all the Bond books—especially if you read them in sequence, starting with "Casino Royale" and closing with "Octopussy"—they melt and mold together into one unending fetishist's dream:

> His two battered suitcases came and he unpacked leisurely and then ordered from Room Service a bottle of the Taittinger Blanc de Blancs that he had made his traditional drink at Royale. When the bottle, in its frosted silver bucket, came, he drank a quarter of it rather fast and then went into the bathroom and had an ice-cold shower and washed his hair with Pinaud Elixir, that prince among shampoos, to get the dust of the roads out of it. Then he slipped on his dark-blue tropical worsted trousers, white sea-island cotton shirt, socks and black casual shoes (he abhorred shoe-laces), and went and sat by the window and looked out across the promenade to the sea and wondered where he would have dinner and what he would choose to eat.

Readers who like to think that brand-name addiction arose with Bret Easton Ellis's "American Psycho" should get a load of this passage from "Thunderball." It prompts several thoughts: that the author has yet to learn what part of speech "leisurely" is; that Bond could easily be gay; and that the recitation of material comforts, when it is taken to extremes, eventually acquires a surreal lyricism that is, indeed, somewhat comforting. Bond's need to stabilize his rocky moods with constant shots of luxury (and the notion that he can afford to do so on a midlevel government salary) is part of what you might call the Fleming theory of self-possession: pile up the possessions, and the self will begin to emerge.

THERE is another, more innocent pleasure to be had from the accoutrements that litter the Bond books. It is the pleasure of the time capsule. Fleming was an obsessive notetaker wherever he went—it relieved him of the pressure to be creative, which was never his strong suit. The density of his research now pulls his readers effortlessly back into a distant, upbeat vision of the fifties and sixties, when luxury was no embarrassment and travel was a gas. Here is Bond starting his flight to America: "The chief steward announced over the loudspeaker that the next stop would be Shannon, where they would dine, and that the flying time would be one hour and fifty minutes, and the great double-decked Stratocruiser rolled slowly out to the east-west runway." *Where they would dine:* it's like reading Thackeray or something.

But the true spirit of the fiction, as opposed to the trimmings, can more fruitfully be traced to another era. Fleming had long nurtured his journalist's contacts in the world of spying, and in August of 1939 they paid off. Shedding with relief the tasks of the stockbroker, he became the assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence (D.N.I.) in the Naval Intelligence Division (N.I.D.), assuming the rank of lieutenant. A month later, he was promoted, as Bond would be, to commander, a distinction commemorated in the three gold bands that were subsequently applied to his (and Bond's) handmade cigarettes; his standing order was for a smog-inducing four hundred a week. Fleming had what is technically known as a good war. He performed well, met women in uniform, and, above all, had the opportunity to write stuff like this:



> 1. Obtain from the Air Ministry an airworthy German bomber.
> 2. Pick a tough crew of five, including a pilot, W/T operator and word-perfect German speaker. Dress them in German Air Force uniform, add blood and bandages to suit.
> 3. Crash plane in the Channel after making SOS to rescue service in P/L.
> 4. Once aboard rescue boat, shoot German crew, dump overboard, bring rescue boat back to English port.

Under any other circumstances, this fantasy—two parts rococo to one part macho—would have been dismissed as the sort of irresponsible junk that you expect from, say, a novelist. In the Britain of 1940 it was, albeit briefly, given serious consideration. Fleming even appended his idea of the ideal pilot for the mission: "Tough bachelor, able to swim." Who on earth could he have had in mind? The standard reading of Bond is that he was, in essence, a creature of the Cold War, but that merely happened to be his setting. His itchy feet, his urge to spread abroad the stalwart values of home (the cover for Fleming's fictional Secret Service was a company named Universal Export), the comical lengths he would go to in flexing and finessing his courage, and the occasional twinge of anxiety that the sacrifice might not be worthwhile: all these were rooted in the Second World War. The novels tell us that Bond saw action in the Navy, but more crucial was Fleming's own inaction—the practice swings of his imagination, as it were, in which he dreamed up escapades for fit young men.

It was in Room 39—his office at the Admiralty—that Fleming also nurtured his love of gadgetry, and the sensation of control that it provides. "I'm going to put this in simple terms and not fill you up with a lot of stuff about Nozzle Expansion Ratios, Exhaust Velocity, and the Keplerian Ellipse," says the rocket wonk in "Moonraker," thus allowing Fleming to prove that he personally is filled with stuff right up to the brim. We take it for granted that the mid-period Bond movies, depressed by the departure of Sean Connery, became fixated on dumb gizmos and weak jokes; but is the Roger Moore version of "Moonraker," in which Bond saves the world and expands his nozzle in zero-gravity orbit, really any worse than the plot of Fleming's book, which asks us to believe that Britain would hand over the construction and launch of its first nuclear deterrent to a private individual with millions in the bank and red whiskers on his face? Lord Beaverbrook, not a man to waste words, called the book a "thrilling story about the good secret service bloke and the bad bastard": an unimprovable piece of critical analysis, I think, in its awareness that what matters about the Bond novels is the central duel of wits between compulsives. This is the one element that has descended from Fleming to the more plaintive, downbeat world of John le Carré: no more kidnapping of nukes but an increasingly single-minded conflict between Smiley and Karla, recalling the great set pieces of Bond versus Blofeld, Bond versus Largo, Bond versus Drax.

In Lycett's hands, Fleming himself becomes a case study in casual megalomania. His friend Ernie Cuneo (later immortalized, for what it was worth, as a cabdriver named Ernie Cureo in "Diamonds Are Forever") once sat on a train and listened to a standard reverie. "Know what I'd like if I could have anything I wanted?" Fleming asked. "I'd like to be the absolute ruler of a country where everybody was crazy about me. Imagine

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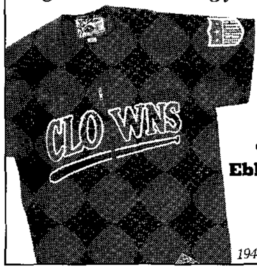

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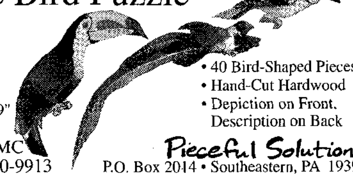

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yourself waking up in the White House. Instantly, the radio would announce to a breathless country, 'He's awake.' Bulletins would follow. 'He's shaving.' 'He's dressing.' 'He's breakfasting.' 'He's reading the papers in the garden.' Finally, at ten-thirty: 'He's ordered the car.' And at eleven o'clock I'd pass out through the gates, tossing medals to deliriously happy hundreds of thousands. I'd like that. And so would they." It is the last line that kills the humor of the speech and sends it spinning toward madness. The clinching vanity of the control freak—be he Blofeld or Mussolini or a self-inflated Fleming—is to assume that world domination *must* logically involve the world loving you back.

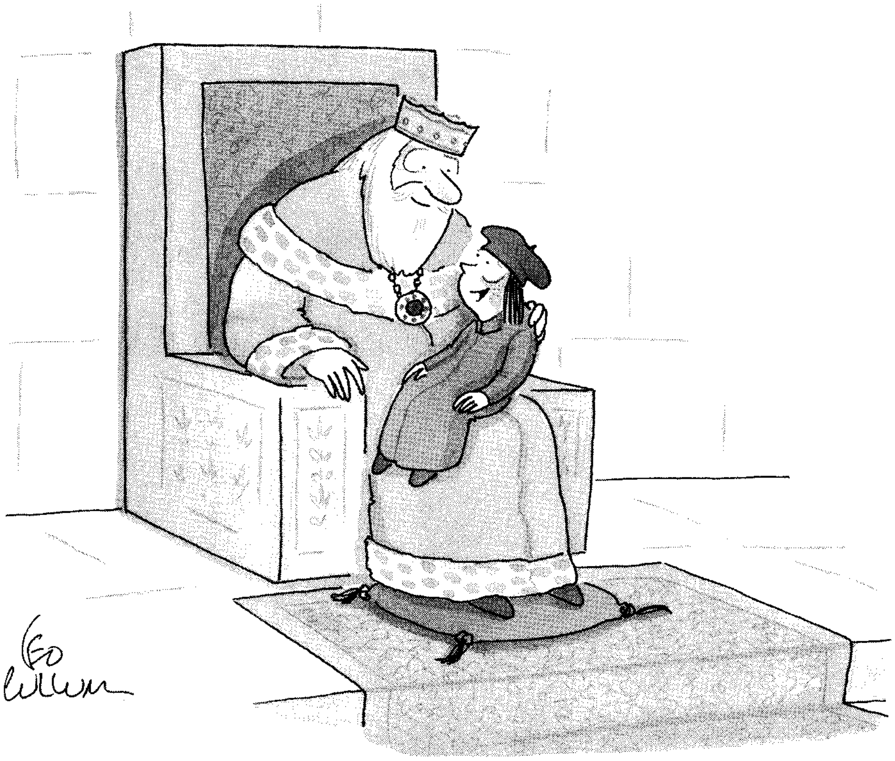
IN Fleming's case, the power kick was almost, but not entirely, harmless. We should be grateful that he became a writer, and never thought of going into politics—a calling that he loftily despised. After the war, he became foreign manager of Kemsley Newspapers, which in practice meant joining the editorial conference at the *Sunday Times* and keeping track of foreign correspondents by means of a world map covered with flashing lights—"a fair old load of bullshit," according to one observer. There is something vaguely pathetic in the image—in the delusions of influence that it suggests, in the echo of a need to live dangerously. The only real risk in Fleming's life at this time was his friendship with Ann Rothermere, the famously cultivated and well-connected wife of the proprietor of a rival newspaper; she married Ian in 1952, roughly a month after he embarked on the career that would bring him fame, wealth, and a steady drip of ridicule from his wife's friends. According to Lycett, "Ian used to say that he wrote 'Casino Royale' in order to take his mind off the horrific prospect of matrimony."

By Fleming's standards, that remark counts as New Age compassion. Whatever else this biography achieves, it will stand as an unrivalled anthology of chauvinist zingers. Fleming once admitted that his perfect wife would be a Dresden shepherdess. Like his friend Evelyn Waugh, Fleming was one of those writers who are at their funniest when they're being most objectionable. But he had boreholes of resentment where Waugh was calmed by irony, and he invariably ends up as the victim of his own jokes. "In the old days I demanded or perhaps pleaded for three things in a wife. She should have enough money to buy her own clothes, she should be able to make incomparable Sauce Béarnaise, and she should be double-jointed. In the event I got none of these things," he said of Ann. What he did get was a willing partner in his sadomasochistic rites: "I am the chosen instrument of the Holy Man to whip some of the devil out of you," he wrote to her, "and I must do my duty however much pain it causes me. So be prepared to drink your cocktails standing for a few days."

Where Fleming acquired his whippy tastes is hard to say, but Lycett does mention that Ian's housemaster at Eton "enjoyed wielding the cane"; and I couldn't help noticing that the youthful Fleming had in rapid succession a mentor called Phyllis Bottome *and* a lover called Monique Panchaud de Bottomes. Where the predilection ended, of course, is far more predictable: with "a beautiful Arab mare who would only allow herself to be ridden by a horseman with steel thighs and velvet hands, and then only with curb and saw bit—and then only when he had broken her to bridle and saddle." That is the heroine of "Thunderball," and the poor girl doesn't have a chance; what dooms her to nothingness is not just sexual submission but the certainty that Fleming's self-arousing prose will forbid her to slip the bonds of caricature and become a character. The last word in gender relations comes in my favorite passage from "Moonraker," a locus classicus of the unhip:

> Hair: Auburn. Eyes: Blue. Height: 5 ft. 7. Weight: 9 stone. Hips: 38. Waist: 26. Bust: 38. Distinguishing marks: Mole on upper curvature of right breast.
> Hm! thought Bond.

All of which leads us to ask the question, Why should we bother with Ian Fleming, or even with Bond? Lycett's long, dry biography is nevertheless worth reading, because it convinces you that Fleming was one of those people who are ideally read about in books; you come away feeling relieved that you never had to encounter him in real life. And what of *his* books? It is hard to deny that many of them remain graceless and indolent; even the saving virtues of the cheap thriller are often beyond them. Pace? Try grinding your way through the start of



"Tell me again about royalties."

• •

"From Russia, with Love," in which Bond doesn't so much as show his face until Chapter 11. Plausibility? If anyone can tell me why a brainwashed Bond tries to squirt cyanide at M. at the beginning of "The Man with the Golden Gun," thus giving his beloved boss a chance to use the new sliding glass screen in front of his desk, I'd be very grateful. Why didn't 007 make use of that excellent invention known as a gun?

And yet in recent weeks I have read little else. The pleasure of finishing one Bond story and immediately picking up the next becomes peculiar and intense. The over-all effect veers toward that of Jacobean drama: there is something dark and nasty about slipping into the poisoned moral swamp of Fleming's tales while the bright, silly plots fade from view. (It is the precise opposite of watching the Bond movies.) Fleming's Bond is notoriously devoted to the good things in life, but not for a moment do they tempt him into the belief that life itself is a good thing. His devotion, in fact, seems to spring from a half-hidden disgust; Lycett thinks that Bond is an antidote to boredom, to what Mr. Big, in "Live and Let Die," describes as "the deadly lethargy that envelops those who are sated, those who have no more desires," but I like to think that Bond himself has to fight off satiety as if it were sleep. He works up his desires and seeks out the likelihood of fresh kills purely to sustain his interest in the world and to play a role, however meaningless, in its functioning. There's a flare of true contempt in "From Russia, with Love," when Bond surveys his younger self: "What would he think of Bond's present assignment? What would he think of the dashing secret agent who was off across the world in a new and most romantic role—to pimp for England?" Hm! Like Fleming, Bond has to pretend that drabness and decline aren't there—that they will go away if you sip enough champagne, sleep with enough women, keep your Bentley well buffed, and maintain sufficiently close links with the prince among shampoos. The strain of the pretense told on Fleming, who suffered a heart attack in 1961 and died three years later, at the age of fifty-six. James Bond, meanwhile, in his scarred and pernickety solitude, acquired a life of his own and made the most of his bitterness: he turned low spirits into high style. "As Bond's biographer," Fleming once said, "I am most anxious to see that he lives as long as possible." His wish was granted. ♦

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FIRST NOVELS

DANCE REAL SLOW, by Michael Grant Jaffe (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $20). In this exploration of contemporary American fatherhood, Gordon Nash is a young lawyer raising his four-year-old son, Calvin, alone in Kansas. Haunted both by his wife's desertion and by the memory of his own taciturn, sports-obsessed father, Nash is trying to set things right. As he enumerates the rituals of his life with Calvin—extracting slugs from shirt pockets, arguing about dessert portions, protecting the neighbor's cat from well-meant tortures—the exhausting cycle of care to which every single parent is bound becomes comically, painfully vivid. Yet Jaffe describes these everyday rhythms with such metaphorical grace and precision that his prose seems a manifestation of Nash's love for his son: we experience, firsthand, the cumulative miracle of such sustained, patient attention.

THE WHITE BOY SHUFFLE, by Paul Beatty (Houghton Mifflin; $19.95). This poet's hip-hop epic never misses a beat in telling how a nerdy black kid from a white-bread neighborhood becomes an infamous inner-city poet laureate, via an obligatory stint as a local basketball hero and some daredevilling as a member of the Gun Totin' Hooligans. Simultaneously hilarious ("I thought about Betty's flecked bouffant, Veronica's flying-saucer-like do, and the oily Jheri curls, rock-hard pomade cold waves, and horsehair weaves of our attackers, and I realized that every day for the black American is a bad hair day") and immensely moving, Beatty's Pynchonesque non sequiturs cascade with the seeming ease of an Armstrong trill.

PAPER WINGS, by Marly Swick (HarperCollins; $21). Swick's novel opens with scenes of tranquil nineteen-sixties domesticity: nine-year-old Suzanne and her family move to a freshly minted suburb of Madison, Wisconsin, that is bursting with kittens, puppies, and optimistic neighbors. Her mother, Helen, is emotionally fragile, and it is Suzanne's self-appointed mission to shore her up. Helen plays along for a while, gamely picking out wallpaper and throwing parties, but when her idol, President Kennedy, is assassinated something snaps. Suzanne's narration elicits the kind of pit-of-the-stomach feeling specially reserved for times of family disintegration, and, while there is no grand tragedy, the loss of those elusive islands of serenity is keenly felt.

THE DEBT TO PLEASURE, by John Lanchester (Holt; $20). A former restaurant critic for the London *Observer*, Lanchester has written a novel masquerading as an essay masquerading as a cookbook, and it somehow manages to combine the virtues of all three. The narrator, Tarquin Winot, is the brother of a famous sculptor, but his own talent—as emerges in the course of his endlessly digressive, enormously erudite disquisitions on food—is for the art of murder. Tarquin's marvellously perverse intelligence never falters, and, fortunately, neither do his lapidary sentences. As Oscar Wilde observed, "the fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose."

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TALKING IN BED, by Antonya Nelson (Houghton Mifflin; $22.95). Two married men meet in a Chicago hospital corridor after their fathers die at almost the same moment. They have nothing else in common: Paddy Limbach, a lovable Christian lug with his own roofing company, is grief-stricken and bewildered by his sudden loss, while Evan Cole, a morally exacting psychologist, has just suffocated his detestable father in a moment of exasperation and is feeling quite elated. Nevertheless, a friendship ensues, and their lives become intimately, and then dangerously, intertwined. This is an unusually complex and richly textured first novel. Suffice it to say that Nelson's portrait of Evan's domestic life, which includes not only patricide but marital infidelities and a trial separation, lingers in one's mind as a testament to the profound importance of family.

FUNNY BOY, by Shyam Selvadurai (Morrow; $23). Arjie, the young narrator of this brisk novel, is as oblivious of the history of ethnic conflict in his native Sri Lanka as he is of the nature of his incipient sexuality. He becomes aware of the former by eavesdropping on his parents' houseguests, and of the latter through furtive experimentation with an ostracized classmate. Instead of focussing exclusively on Arjie's sexual awakening, however, Selvadurai emphasizes the politically precarious circumstances that surround him, and effectively bears witness to the stunning speed with which instability can become slaughter.

SUSPICIOUS RIVER, by Laura Kasischke (Houghton Mifflin; $22.95). This latest addition to a growing genre—the feminist erotic thriller—recounts Leila Murray's numb addiction to sexual violence after she overhears, as a seven-year-old, the murder of her mother at the hands of her lover and brother-in-law. Small-time tricks picked up at a motel's front desk lead Leila to a desperate craving for a man who specializes in literally and repeatedly knocking her back "into my skin from the oblivion where I'd been." By turns terrifying and ravishingly lyrical, the book is finally a metaphysical exploration of the separation between body and mind.

SNAKEBITE SONNET, by Max Phillips (Little, Brown; $22.95). After Nick, a gallant ten-year-old, sucks poison from a snakebite on the thigh of nineteen-year-old Julia, he finds himself caught in a lifelong game of sexual peekaboo. Julia's comically unconsummated visitations over the years ruin a series of Nick's monogamies, which in themselves constitute a graphic satire of bedroom mores. ("I think sometimes you don't like that I want to screw," a Dutch girlfriend complains.) The author has the ear and eye and *cojones* to keep pace with all this fond brutality and the mess the two are continually making of everyone else's life.

MIDDLE SON, by Deborah Iida (Algonquin; $18.95). This graceful novel is narrated by Spencer Fujii, the Americanized grandson of Japanese issei who came to Hawaii to work in the sugarcane fields. As the novel opens, Spencer is visiting his ailing widowed mother on the Maui plantation where she still lives. They speak of the past in the distinctive dialect of the islands, and Spencer revisits the memories of his boyhood there, eventually confronting the guilt and grief caused by his older brother's accidental death. Despite an occasional lapse into artificial simplicity, Iida has succeeded in crafting a linguistically inventive and emotionally layered tale.

THE ART FAIR, by David Lipsky (Doubleday; $22.50). As a child being shuttled between divorced parents, Richard Freeley quickly learns that a tearful departure will get him bumped up to first class. By the time he's sixteen, he is a master of calculation. In this darkly comic love story, when he witnesses his mother's fall from grace as a painter he becomes obsessed with reinstating her behind the velvet ropes of the New York art world. The consequences of Richard's sublimated ambition are all too believable, and the price he pays comes as a creepy aftershock.

THE DISTANCE FROM THE HEART OF THINGS, by Ashley Warlick (Houghton Mifflin; $21.95). When Mavis Black comes home from college for her aunt Hazel's wedding in rural South Carolina, she suddenly sees everything in a new light: Elsbeth, her mother, who never got over the death of her true love in a fiery explosion; Owen, Mavis's irresistible misbehaving uncle; Punk, her grandfather, who runs the family vineyard; and especially Harris, her boyfriend, whom she left behind. Mavis feels wiser than all of them put together, and the wonderful thing about this affecting novel is that she's right: bright, sensual, adventuresome but utterly reliable, Mavis stays with you long after the particulars of Hazel's troublesome marriage and Owen's battles with Punk have faded.

GETTING OVER HOMER, by Mark O'Donnell (Knopf; $21). This is an entrancing, hilarious novel. When Blue Monahan, the youngest—by five minutes—and only gay child born into a huge Cleveland brood, asks his brothers if he can play football, they tell him to play Left Out. His mom's nickname is Mother Discourage: when a song Blue writes as a child lands him on "The Ed Sullivan Show" she welcomes him home by whispering, "Remember, grownups have to make livings." Blue's account of his search for love in New York's mean streets has the zany gusto—and pathos—of Saturday-morning cartoons.

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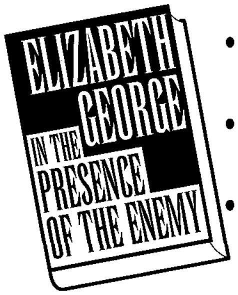
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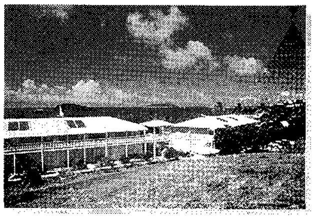

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WRITING IS EASY!

BY STEVE MARTIN

WRITING is the most easy, painfree, and happy way to pass the time of all the arts. As I write this, for example, I am sitting comfortably in my rose garden and typing on my new computer. Each rose represents a story, so I'm never at a loss for what to type. I just look deep into the heart of the rose, read its story, and then write it down. I could be typing *kjfiu joew.mv jiw* and enjoy it as much as typing words that actually make sense, because I simply relish the movements of my fingers on the keys. It is true that sometimes agony visits the head of a writer. At those moments, I stop writing and relax with a coffee at my favorite restaurant, knowing that words can be changed, rethought, fiddled with, and ultimately denied. Painters don't have that luxury. If they go to a coffee shop, their paint dries into a hard mass.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

I would like to recommend that all writers live in California, because here, in between those moments when one is looking into the heart of a rose, one can look up at the calming blue sky. I feel sorry for writers—and there are some pretty famous ones—who live in places like South America and Czechoslovakia, where I imagine it gets pretty dank. These writers are easy to spot. Their books are often filled with disease and negativity. If you're going to write about disease, I would say California is the place to do it. Dwarfism is never funny, but look at what happened when it was dealt with in California. Seven happy dwarfs. Can you imagine seven dwarfs in Czechoslovakia? You would get seven melancholic dwarfs at best—seven melancholic dwarfs and no handicap-parking spaces.

NISHAN AKGULIAN

LOVE IN THE TIME OF CHOLERA: WHY IT'S A BAD TITLE

I admit that "Love in the time of . . ." is a great title, up to a point. You're reading along, you're happy, it's about *love.* I like the way the word *time* comes in—a nice, nice feeling. Then the morbid *Cholera* appears. I was happy till then. Why not "Love in the Time of the Blue, Blue, Bluebirds"? "Love in the Time of Oozing Sores and Pustules" is probably an earlier title the author used as he was writing in a rat-infested tree house on an old Smith Corona. This writer, whoever he is, could have used a couple of weeks in Pacific Daylight Time.

A LITTLE EXPERIMENT

I took the following passage, which was no doubt written in some depressing place, and attempted to rewrite it under the sunny influence of California:

> Most people deceive themselves with a pair of faiths: they believe in *eternal memory* (of people, things, deeds, nations) and in *redressibility* (of deeds, mistakes, sins, wrongs). Both are false faiths. In reality the opposite is true: everything will be forgotten and nothing will be redressed.—*Milan Kundera.*

Sitting in my garden, watching the bees glide from flower to flower, I let the above paragraph filter through my mind. The following New Paragraph emerged:

> I feel pretty,
> Oh so pretty,
> I feel pretty, and witty, and bright.

Kundera was just too wordy. Sometimes the delete key is your best friend.

WRITER'S BLOCK: A MYTH

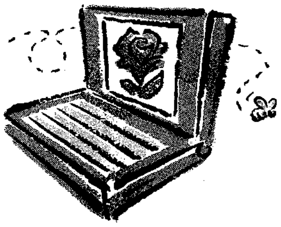
Writer's block is a fancy term made up by whiners so they can have an excuse to drink alcohol. Sure, a writer can get stuck for a while, but when that happens to a real author—say, a Socrates or a Rodman—he goes out and gets an "as told to." The alternative is to hire yourself out as an "as heard from," thus taking all the credit. The other trick I use when I have a momentary stoppage is virtually foolproof, and I'm happy to pass it along. Go to an already published novel and find a sentence that you absolutely adore. Copy it down in your manuscript. Usually, that sentence will lead you to another sentence, and pretty soon your own ideas will start to flow. If they don't, copy down the next sentence in the novel. You can safely use up to three sentences of someone else's work—unless you're friends, then two. The odds of being found out are very slim, and even if you are there's usually no jail time.

A DEMONSTRATION OF ACTUAL WRITING

It's easy to talk about writing, and even easier to do it. Watch:

> Call me Ishmael. It was cold, very cold here in the mountain town of Kilimanjaroville.® I could hear a bell. It was tolling.[1] I knew exactly for who it was tolling, too. It was tolling for me, Ishmael Twist.© [Author's note: I am now stuck. I walk over to a rose and look into its heart.] That's right, Ishmael Twist.©

This is an example of what I call "pure" writing, which occurs when there is no possibility of its becoming a screenplay. Pure writing is the most rewarding of all, because it is constantly accompanied by a voice that repeats, "Why am I writing this?" Then, and only then, can the writer hope for his finest achievement: the voice of the reader uttering its complement, "Why am I reading this?" ♦



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[1] This sentence written by Steve Martin as heard from Cindy Adams

Let's face it, ask most people to describe working in an auto factory and the word "fun" is not going to come up. Even in the Saturn plant, [illegible] calls it fun, you'll more than likely hear them refer to it as respectful, cooperative and fair. ☺ That's because the very first thing we did was get rid of labels like "management." And "labor." ☺ Instead, we decided to work in teams. Where everyone has a voice. And where decisions about everything from work environment to quality standards are put in place by consensus rather than by ramrod. ☺ And you know what's happened as a result? To a person, all eight thousand of us here have discovered that when you give people a say in what they're building they'll take pride in what they're building. Or as someone over in Door Assembly put it, "Happy workers make better cars." ☺ They also make better barbecue. A whole bunch of us recently chipped in and put a grill out back. So come Fridays after work? You guessed it; that's the fun part.

SATURN.

Gary Moore, Kerano Tucker and Ellen Emeott of the Door Assembly team sum it up quite nicely: "Happy workers make better cars."

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